

If I'm Saved By  
**GRACE,**  
Why Bother With  
**WORKS?**

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Learn to Work for Your Inheritance, Not Your Salvation

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**Bob Sjogren**

If I'm Saved By Grace, Why Bother With Works?

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This book is dedicated  
to God in hopes that  
He may be able to  
fully live out His glory and grace  
by giving the body of Christ  
their full inheritance.



A special note of thanks  
goes to Joseph Dillow  
and Randy Alcorn  
who have mentored me  
through the incredible insights  
found in their books.  
I will be forever  
grateful.



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# If I'm Saved By Grace, Why Bother With Works?

# Introduction

Before time began, before the first electron was put together, God dreamed up a plan exclusively for you. This plan not only includes what is happening to you right now during these 80 or so years you live on earth, but it also includes what God wants you to have forever in Eternity Future. In fact, 99.9999...% of those plans for you are in Eternity Future. And He did all of this in Eternity Past.

What God wants for you, in biblical terms, is called a “kingdom” or an “inheritance.” That’s right. God has a kingdom—an inheritance—waiting just for you. We see this in Matthew chapter 25 where rewards are given to the sheep:

*Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.’ (Matthew 25:34)*

Note it is *your inheritance/kingdom prepared for you*. That means it is tailored to you personally. Since God is impeccable, it means your personality will be a perfect fit for that kingdom. Your gifts will be exactly what is needed in that kingdom. Your warm, loving nature will boost the spirits of hundreds if not thousands of others who interact with you. Each word you say will be encouraging to them. Every word you hear back from others will boost your spirit as well. Every act you do will be meaningful. Every touch will be loving.

Playing your role in your personal kingdom will absolutely thrill you to no end. Every day you’ll wake up exploding with joy saying, “I can’t wait to see what this day holds! I love my life! I love my existence! God is so good. How could I ever ask for anything better?”

But what does it mean to actually have a kingdom? Does this mean you’re going to be a king or a queen? That could possibly be what God means. (But it will be a king or a queen with a small “k” or “q” because the King of Kings will always be there

with you.) Does it mean you're going to rule over others? Could it be that you'll be like a governor of a state or a mayor of a city? Maybe yes, maybe no.

Sadly, the Scriptures only allow you the "aroma" of what you're going to partake in, but it doesn't give you, nor any of us, specifics. You'll never understand exactly what your kingdom is like until you die and stand before Jesus.

Yet because God chose to use the words "kingdom" and "inheritance"—and because God never does anything half-heartedly—it must be magnificent. And remember, it is tailored for you. Your kingdom will be absolutely, magnificently glorious. You don't want to miss it.

Unfortunately, you can make it to heaven and not get this kingdom God prepared for you in Eternity Past.

You see, getting to heaven and inheriting the kingdom God has for you are two totally different things. You get to heaven by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, but you earn the kingdom He wants for you through how you live your life on this earth.

The first is all about grace. This refers to your name being recorded in heaven. The second, inheriting your kingdom, is all about works. It references being rewarded in heaven.

When I was a child, I grew up with Catholic friends and Protestant friends. My Catholic friends told me that I would go to heaven by being a good person and doing good works. And they had Scripture references that backed up what they were saying. But my Protestant friends told me that I would get to heaven solely by putting my faith in Jesus. And they had Scripture references to support their claim!

Oh, how confused I was. If I had only known the difference between my name being recorded in heaven and being rewarded in heaven, my childhood theology would have been a lot clearer!

This book is here to warn you: You can get to heaven by the grace of God but totally miss the kingdom God prepared in advance for you. If you don't work for your eternal kingdom here on earth (earning it), you won't get it.

The teachings found in the pages of this book are not a "works-oriented salvation" nor are they a "faith plus works



oriented salvation." This is because faith deals with getting into heaven. Works deal with earning your inheritance.

As you learn the difference between getting into heaven and being rewarded, you will clearly see the relationship between faith and works. What was once a paradox for me for decades will hopefully become clear for you. And once you see it, there is so much freedom!

So get ready. You're about to learn something that may blow you away! It blew me away and set my soul on fire. I hope it does yours as well.

Stop working for your salvation. Learn to work for the kingdom God has prepared for you since the beginning of time.

Bob Sjogren

## If I'm Saved By Grace, Why Bother With Works?

## Chapter 1: Five Lives

Where: Small Town in Iowa

She hesitated before she touched “send.”

Her eyes closed as a single tear fell down each cheek. Her soul wrestled within her, *How else is he ever going to accept me or love me?* This was all she knew. This was her life. There was no way out of it.

She was just about to touch send when another voice inside of her cried out. *No. This isn't right. There's something wrong with this. It doesn't have to be this way.*

She took her hand away from her iPhone. The war waged inside her. She tried to numb her thoughts but it didn't last long. The other voice returned.

*Come on. This is what happens every night. Get used to it. This is why he cares for you. This is the life God has given you. Just accept it.*

Without thinking, she touched send and began crying silently on her bed.

Jim saw the text immediately. He had been expecting it. It was about that time of the night. He closed his eyes in disgust. He hated himself. There was a long pause as he tried to block out his own disapproval.

Silently he prayed, “Oh God, here I am a pastor. I counsel others. I'm supposed to be giving them such great insights into learning the power of walking with you. And yet I so struggle myself.”

He was so mad at his wife. Why did she have to go to bed so early every night? Why couldn't they be like most husbands and wives and have an intimacy that was more than just the words, “I love you, goodnight”?

He stared back at his phone. *This has got to stop*, he thought to himself. He replied, “You know, you don't have to do this.” He

sent it—not sure as to what kind of a response he wanted.

Her phone buzzed with his response. More tears flowed, but she knew how she had to respond.

“No, I want it.” What she didn’t write was “so that I know you’ll keep loving me.” She knew so little about the power love had in her life. It made her do things she would never tell anyone. It made her keep such deep, dark secrets and had such a grip in her life.

Jim’s phone showed her response. He read it, half happy, half disgusted with himself. He once again bowed his head sickened by his addiction.

Powerless to do anything else, he opened the door of his study and walked fifteen feet down the hall to her room, cursing every step.

She heard his footsteps and quickly wiped away the tears, pulled off her pajamas, and tried to be happy. Though the tears were gone, her mind kept questioning things. *Was this the only reason why they adopted me? Did momma know about this? And why did momma have to go to bed so early each night? Oh how I wish I was still back in Brazil at the orphanage...*

He opened her door. “Hello, Gabriella, thanks for texting me...”

## Where: A Prison In Tianshui, China

Pastor Xian ached with pain. *How many more times are they going to beat me?* he thought to himself. *They know I’m never going to give up my faith in Jesus and I’m never going to tell them who the other members in our church movement are.*

After having been thrown to the cold, damp floor of his prison, he was in too much pain to even move. A rat scrambled out of his room, agitated by his rude intrusion. He lay there in a fetal position for more than an hour.

Eventually the cold dampness of the floor became worse than the pain. He tried to stand, but excruciating pain shot through his left leg. Their abusive blows had so badly bruised both legs that there was no way he could put any pressure on ei-

ther of them. *Were they both broken? Oh, not again, please, Lord.* He was afraid to even put his hand on them to see if he could feel a break—they were way too painful to even touch.

He wished there had at least been some light. *It must have been, what, two or three a.m.?* he thought to himself. *Why can't they beat me in the day when I'm awake?* He hated this torture.

In the complete darkness, he felt around for the bed. Well, it wasn't really a bed—it was two long boards put on four cement blocks. There was a thin sheet—so worn you could almost see through it, and it provided almost no warmth.

He slowly moved to a seated position on the floor. Then, pushing down hard with each hand, he lifted his entire body up just enough to inch it closer to the bed while dragging his battered legs. Each of the movements sent searing pain through his legs. Finally he was able to lean up against the “bed.”

*I'll rest here,* he thought to himself.

Silently he prayed, “Oh Lord, why have You blessed Your servant so much that I should suffer for Your name's sake? Why have I been the privileged one who has been allowed to bear such great anger from Your enemies? Though I long for these to stop and I long for freedom, allow them for however long they will bring You glory.”

His prayer was interrupted by a yawn—and even that hurt. He winced slightly.

“And Lord, please continue to bless my wife and two children. You must take care of them. You must let them know how loved they are. It's been five years, Lord. How long must they go without their father? How long must they wonder about Your goodness and Your love? Please Lord, for the sake of Your great name, be close to my children. Let them know the extreme joy that I have while fellowshiping with You even here in this prison. Let them know of Your love and peace. Help them to see that You really are a good, great, mighty, awesome God.”

It was after these beatings that Xian felt the closest to God.

Where: Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Fatimah couldn't believe her maid was coming back to her again. She smiled. This Filipino was different than any other maid she had ever had.

"Dimasuay," she said as her maid walked into the room smiling. "Tell me again, what does your name mean?"

"It means 'unstoppable' in Tagalog," she said smiling.

"It sure fits you," Fatimah said. "You've worked all day, taken care of my children, cooked my meals, made my beds, cleaned the house, cleaned the dishes, put the children down, and you somehow still seem to smile."

"Madam," Dimasuay replied incredulously, "You know it's because of my love for Jesus that I am like this!"

"Quiet!" Fatimah said harshly with piercing eyes. "If others heard of our love for Jesus, there would be great trouble. My husband should be home any minute."

Dimasuay was startled at the harshness of her tone.

"I'm sorry, Dimasuay, for yelling," Fatimah continued with a gentler spirit. "But if my husband finds out that you are a believer in Jesus, he will kick you out, not only of this house, but of the entire country. But at least you'll have your life. If he finds out that I believe in Jesus, it means instant death. You must be very careful about what you say about our Lord."

Dimasuay shook her head in understanding. She understood Fatimah's words all too well and went down to a mere whisper. "Madam Fatimah," said Dimasuay, "have you heard about brother James in the church?"

"No," said Fatimah with a degree of concern. "What has happened to him?"

"He fell and broke his back. He can't work any longer. They're forcing him to leave the country and to pay his own way back home because they say it was his fault."

Fatimah was disgusted with the ethics of these hypocrites. "When will these people ever honor God with their actions?" she said quietly to herself. "They say they are servants of God, but their actions speak otherwise." She spit on the ground. Dima-

suay knew she would have to clean it up tomorrow, but she didn't mind.

"How much money does he need?" Fatimah queried.

"To get back to Manila, he's going to need \$2,500 in U.S. dollars," Dimasuay said quietly.

"How much does he have now?" asked Fatimah.

"I gave all I have in savings, \$100," said Dimasuay. "The rest of the church has gathered another \$700." She put her head down not knowing what else to say.

"So you've come here to ask me for money I suppose," said Fatimah.

"Yes, ma'am," said Dimasuay humbly. Her fire and zeal were missing.

Fatimah just looked at her. In her account she had hundreds of thousands of dollars her husband had given her just to spend on herself. God had so blessed the Saudis with oil. Money was never her problem. Love, good workers, and a faithful husband were, but not money. Yet she hated it when the foreign workers in the secret church needed money. With one check she could meet all the needs. But for some reason, she just didn't want to do that. She didn't want them to continually be coming to her with requests.

But one look at Dimasuay, the Unstoppable, changed her heart—almost. "Okay, I'll give \$1,000 to help him."

Dimasuay's eyes exploded with disbelief. "A thousand? Really?"

"Quiet, Dimasuay, how many times do I have to tell you? Speak quietly. I like you. I want to keep you. But you can't let my husband know about this. I'll have it in cash tomorrow for you."

Dimasuay ran to Fatimah and gave her a big hug. Fatimah didn't know what to do with this. She wasn't use to expressing her feelings through physical touch—though she admitted to herself that she did enjoy it at times.

"It's okay, Dimasuay," Fatimah said. "Now go run along and tell the others at the church. I'll see you later tonight when you return home."

Running out the door at near break-neck speed, she almost

bumped into Mustapha, Fatimah's husband. "Oh, sorry," she said with a smile and ran off into the darkness.

"What was that all about?" Mustapha asked Fatimah, returning from his weekly Wednesday night outing.

"Oh, you know her. She's always excited about something," she said, hoping her husband would drop the conversation.



## Chapter 2: Judgment Day

Where: Heaven, Judgment Day

The Almighty's face already shone like the sun, but it was clear that it was somehow radiating even more glory than before. Being the Ancient of Days, his face was a mixture of maturity, joy and wisdom. Yet it had a youthful side to it as well. How could both be true at the same time? He was—and is—amazing.

"Jesus," the Father said smiling, "I believe this time is yours."

Jesus had been seated right next to the Father on his throne, His face too radiating an even greater glory than usual. "I've been waiting for this day for a long, long time," Jesus said with a great sense of anticipation. "Imagine, Father, We dreamed this up in Eternity Past, and now We will finally live it out!"

He slowly got up and began to look into the heart of each and every person—piercing their souls with His own joy! Although there was a vast ocean of people from every tongue, tribe and nation, His eyes seemed to be focused on each individual person with such care and love, it was as if he or she were the only person who existed.

Moving down from the throne, he began to greet his loved ones individually. It took forever—and an instant—all at the same time.

Finally, it was judgment time.

"Gabriella," Jesus said with a tenderness she'd never heard before from anyone on earth. "Your life was so hard. Your challenges were so great. Please know I was with you each step along the way. Though you were homeless throughout much of your adult life, I was always there. Though you never experienced love through any of the four men you took into your arms, I was your husband. And I am here now to show you what unconditional love is going to be like—and to not only give it to you, but to shower it on you. Welcome home, My love."

Gabriella burst into tears and fell into Jesus' arms as He gen-

tly caressed her sobbing body. After what seemed like hours, He finally turned to the next person, Jim.

"Jim," Jesus said with such compassion. "I love—"

Before Jesus could even finish the short three-word sentence, Jim blurted out, "I'm sorry Jesus. I'm so sorry." Tears were streaming down his face. His body began to sob. "I know I ruined Gabriella's life. I know that's not how a father of an adopted child was supposed to act. I know she blames me and she is right. I ruined her life for good. I'm so sorry. And my wife knew something was wrong. But she wasn't strong enough to face up to me because of my anger. I didn't love her like you loved the church..." He couldn't get his words out fast enough.

"This is all true," said Jesus with a smile and a show of concern all at the same time. "And I know you're sorry. And I know your brokenness. But I also know that my death paid not only the full penalty for all you did, but it paid double.<sup>1</sup> Jim," Jesus hesitated until Jim looked him straight in the eye, "your sins have been forgiven. I completely and wholeheartedly forgave you on the cross over 2,000 years ago."

Jim continued sobbing, but now with a freedom of brokenness he had never experienced before. "Thank you, Jesus," Jim said, kneeling at his feet sobbing. Jesus lifted him up and gave him a big bear hug.

"It's over, Jim. Welcome home."

After a long embrace with Jim, Jesus' smile broadened and He turned to Xian.

"Xian," Jesus said, almost with a sense of great pride. "I'm so glad you are home."

Xian fell at Jesus' feet and cried, "My Lord and my God."

"Rise, My friend," Jesus said. "You have been faithful to make My Father's glory shine. Thirty years in prison and you never once grumbled. Thirty years in prison and you never once complained. You trusted Me to take care of your wife. You trusted Me to take care of your children. You trusted Me to love your enemies through you. Never once did you curse them. Never once did you want to harm them. I am so proud of you, Xian."

They embraced each other with such respect and awe; it

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 40:2

was glorious.

“And My unstoppable, Dimasuay,” Jesus said turning to the young Filipino woman. She bowed in humble adoration. “Rise and give Me a hug, young lady!” She quickly rose to her feet and gave Him the biggest hug she could.

“You were such a bright shining light for My Name, Dimasuay. You showed Fatimah how to live life and trust in Me. You always obeyed her and never grumbled about how you were treated. And you even led her children to know Me. And what you don't know is that My Father even used you to have a great impact on her husband, though he never let it be known. Great job, my dear. I'm so proud of you. Welcome home.”

Finally releasing her, He called for her boss. “Fatimah,” Jesus said with a cherishing tone. “Oh, Lord,” she said, falling at His feet.

“Rise, My daughter of Ishmael. You were so wonderful holding on to My Name in the midst of the Islamic religion. Though you had to be secretive, you were faithful to hide My word, and not only to read it, but also to memorize long passages. You even showed your husband a gentle and quiet spirit in the midst of an unpleasant marriage. You have done well, Fatimah, my beloved.”

Fatimah clung to Jesus. She was thankful that Dimasuay had forced her to give and receive physical touch and hugs, because she now loved being in the arms of Jesus.

The procession of the masses seemed to take only moments for the people from every tongue, tribe, and nation. And yet when each one met Jesus personally, the exchange seemed to last an eternity. It was incredible how God could bend time for each person. All were happy. All were full of joy. All were amazed at being in the presence of Jesus.

Having finished with everyone, Jesus withdrew to His high and exalted throne next to His Father. And with a loud voice no one could miss, He boomed:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me by My Father. I am Lord of both the living and the dead. I am the righteous Judge. And now, at this moment, I declare all of you to be righteous. Welcome to paradise!”

Though they knew they were saved, an eruption louder than

the mightiest thunder clap filled the corners of heaven. Cheers, hallelujahs, and hymns of praise were all directed toward Jesus and the Father. It seemed to go on for days.

Jesus kept smiling at their joy, but finally moved His hands to quiet the masses down. There would be an eternity to celebrate. He, of all people, knew. When the cheers faded, Jesus spoke once again:

“Not only am I the righteous Judge, but My Father has given Me the blessing of rewarding you here in this place. And because I love you all equally, and because My grace is rich and full, I give you all of the rewards and trust—and know—you will share them all equally. And on top of this, you shall all be a part of My bride—being by My side forever!”

At this, Jesus opened up His hands, instantly revealing rewards beyond what all eyes together could see—or even comprehend.

It took a long time to distribute them equally, but no one was in a rush. In time, they each found their mansion with their name on it. Jesus' grace was certainly being lavished upon them. There was an unspeakable joy and a disbelief in the goodness of God.

Jim found his house to be the same size as Xian's. He smiled to himself thinking, *Wow, I never got victory over my selfish flesh, and I even got to live out fleshly desires my whole life, and I'm still rewarded like Xian. Though I tried to help people in my church through counseling, I really didn't have to do any of that Jesus stuff at all. It really is all about the grace of God. This is amazing!*

Gabriella realized that even though she had been abused and made bad choices all of her life—living on the streets and having four children by four different men, none of whom she had ever married—she received the same rewards as Dimasuay who was faithful to God her entire life. She smiled to herself thinking, *My screwed up life only affected me down on earth. God's grace here in paradise is greater than my poor choices. What an awesome God!*

Jim, Gabriella, Xian, Fatimah, and Dimasuay all walked the streets of gold. They all equally enjoyed the same-sized mansions, beautiful parks, and gorgeous nature. Each was as close to Jesus as the other. And they all knew the Father's unconditional love for each of them. Life was amazing. Heaven was amazing. Paradise was amazing. God was awesome.

As the first days of Eternity Future began to take shape, Fatimah and Xian had questions. Because their old natures had been destroyed, these were innocent questions. There were many things they didn't understand. The good news was that Jesus never tired of answering questions. In fact, He loved it.

One day, Jesus met with Fatimah and Xian.

"You have questions for me, don't you?" Jesus said in a loving, intimate way, knowing what was going to be said before Fatimah even spoke.

"Yes, Jesus," said Fatimah. "Something's been bugging me."

"What is it, My daughter of Ishmael?"

"Well, you remember how the people in the secret church had needs, right?"

"Oh yes, I remember that quite well, as if it was just yesterday," said Jesus smiling.

"And you remember that Dimasuay would always give her \$10 or \$50 or \$100, right? But I would give \$100 or \$500 or \$1,000. I always tried to match her ten to one."

"Oh yes, I was so proud of you for doing that," replied Jesus.

"Well, I thought that when I got to heaven, that I would be rewarded more—maybe ten times more—because I gave more."

"Oh, I see," said Jesus, trying to act a little surprised.

"And, Lord," Xian interrupted, now that the proverbial cat was out of the bag. "I was quite shocked to find out that Jim, who abused his adopted daughter all of her growing-up years, ruining her life, was awarded the same as me who spent 30 years in prison for my faith. Though I couldn't be there for my family, I faithfully prayed for my wife and children but never got to see them."

"Oh, I see. So," Jesus paused, "you both think I'm being unjust or unfair, is that it?"

Both sets of eyes opened wide, knowing how impossible it would be to call the righteous judge "unjust" or "unfair." So they hesitated to answer, knowing how impossible and rude that would be. Plus, they also realized that the rewards they had were far greater than they deserved. But another side of them wanted to say, "Yes, that's exactly it."

Knowing that Jesus loved them completely and uncondition-

ally, Xian was the first to softly speak.

“Lord, all you’ve given us is far more than we deserve. Your grace is far more than we deserve. We could never thank you enough throughout eternity. But I think you’ve said it yourself. The honest answer is yes. In some ways it doesn’t seem fair.” Xian was careful not to say that “Jesus” wasn’t being fair, but that “it” didn’t seem fair.

Jesus smiled and then began telling a parable from Matthew 20.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a fair day’s wage for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

“About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went.

“He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’

“‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered.

“He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’

“When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’

“The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’

“But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you.’”

Fatimah put her head down smiling. Jesus could see her

face.

"You know the rest of the parable, don't you?" said Jesus.

"Yes," said Fatimah.

"Me, too," said Xian sheepishly.

"Finish it for me, Fatimah," Jesus said with a tender voice.

Fatimah picked it right up where Jesus left off. "The owner said, 'Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?'"

"Matthew 20:1-16, right, Jesus?" Xian said, fairly sure he was right but leaving room for error.

"That's right," Jesus smiled.

Xian and Fatimah both burst out laughing knowing their question was answered and knowing that Jesus was never upset with them. "We get it Lord," Xian said to Jesus, looking at Fatimah then back to Jesus. "You can do whatever You want. Thank You for the privilege of letting us be here with You."

"Yes, Lord," Fatimah said with alacrity. "You bless whomever you want, any way you want to bless them. We will simply rejoice with them! Everything we have is more than we deserve."

Jesus smiled and gave them both a big hug—one in each arm.



Turn The Page To Finish The Chapter!



NOT.

Since Judgment Day has never come upon us, the preceding events never took place. But this book is here to tell you that the scenario on the past few pages *never will* take place.

When we get to heaven, Jesus is not going to smile with his hands open wide and say, "Here are My rewards. And because I love you all equally, I want you all to have them and share them equally." Nor will He say, "I'm rewarding you all equally because it's all by My grace anyhow." Scripture points us nowhere in that direction.

That's what this entire book is trying to shout out!



## Chapter 3: A Kingdom Prepared For You

To find out why the scenario in Chapter 2 is never going to happen, we need to look at what God wants to do in Eternity Future. The more we understand what He wants to do there, the more we'll understand why that scenario will never take place.

A key to Eternity Future is located in the book of Ephesians in the second chapter. This clue is found in the context of Paul explaining “why” we are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms. Paul says there is a reason as to why you and I are saved. We know there's a reason because Paul uses the words “in order that.” It's not simply because God found us sinful and wanted to save us. It goes way beyond that. It has something to do with what God gets to do. Let's look at it in Ephesians 2:6-7:

*And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:6-7)*

Now, in the reason clause (after the words “in order that”), Paul refers to God four times (**he** might show... **his** grace... **his** kindness... **Christ Jesus**) and to us once (kindness to **us**). In simple terms, heaven (why we are saved) is eighty percent about what God gets to do and only twenty percent about us! (And we thought it was all about us—wrong!)

*Heaven is far more about what God gets to do than about what we get.* So what does God get to do?

What God gets to do is found in the words “he might show.” That Greek verb *endeiknymi* can be translated:

- to live out
- to put on display
- to prove

In other words, God wants to “live out” something or “put something on display” or “prove something”—or possibly, all

three things at the same time.

What does He want to live out and/or put on display and/or prove? The text is very clear: “the riches of his grace.” God wants to live out His grace. He wants to put His grace on display. He wants to prove His grace.

How long does God want to do this? The text says “in the coming ages.” In other words, He wants to live out and prove His grace forever and ever and ever!

God is really into grace. In fact, not only does He want to put it on display and live it out, but He wants to do it in such a way that it radically pours all over us! He wants to “lavish” it on us.

*In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. (Ephesians 1:7-8a)*

The Greek verb translated lavish carries with it the meaning “to abound or overflow.” It easily conveys the idea that we'll have far more grace than we will ever need. God is a gracious God.

Just how is He going to do that?

## **Ruling and Reigning**

When I am speaking on this topic, I ask my audiences to consider how God could lavish His grace upon us forever in Eternity Future. I usually get answers that I call “inside the box.” They'll say things like “give us a relationship with Him forever,” “forgive us of our sins,” or even “He'll let us be with Him forever in heaven.”

“All of those answers are way inside the box,” I tell them. “Think outside the box.”

There is usually a long pause communicating that they're stuck. Once the pause becomes uncomfortable, I help them out by saying, “Could He makes us gods?”

“No,” they reply in unison.

“So just what could He do?”

Usually there is another long silence. Then someone quietly says—more as a question than a statement, “Allow us to rule and reign with Him?”

“Yes!” I cry. “God is going to allow us to rule and reign with Him forever in Eternity Future! Now that is grace—taking sinful beings and not only redeeming them, but then allowing them to rule and reign with Him over His entire universe. It doesn’t get any more gracious than that!”

But where do the people in my audiences get the idea that God wants us to rule and reign with Him? Is it from the Bible?

The answer is yes and is found in a few key verses. The first that I like to point out is in Revelation 3:21:

*To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. (Revelation 3:21)*

When the word throne is used in the context of Scripture, it always includes the idea of ownership (usually of property), ruling, and reigning. In other words, it means having some sphere of influence in a hierarchical sort of way over some four dimensional area. It involves kingly power or royalty. It implies being in a place of judgment as a modern-day judge presides over a courtroom.

In no way does Revelation 3:21 simply mean “we’ll be with Jesus forever.” It clearly means we will somehow be ruling and reigning with Jesus forever.

Another verse that points us in that direction is found in Revelation 2:26:

*To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations (Revelation 2:26)*

The word authority ties in completely with the idea of sitting with Christ on His throne and ruling over a geographical area. Those on thrones have authority. And this authority will not be over one or two people, not even a city, but over “nations,” which seems to imply multiple cities with differing peoples in them. Wow! That is a ton of grace for one who was once merely a sinner without any chance of being reconciled!

Paul's letter to Timothy also points us in this direction:

*If we endure, we will also reign with him. (2 Timothy 2:12)*

We also find it in Paul's letter to the Romans:

*The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Romans 8:16,17)*

Did you see those words “co-heirs with Christ”? Whatever Christ is going to inherit, we are going to inherit. We will be co-heirs with him.

This is not only Pauline Theology (2 Timothy 2:12, Romans 8:16,17) touched upon by John, the writer of Revelation (Revelation 3:21, 2:26), but Jesus Himself indicates that we are going to be governing over others if we are faithful. He starts out with His disciples.

*And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me,<sup>30</sup> so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Luke 22:29-30)*

He is going to give His disciples a kingdom. Is this a temporary kingdom here on earth? Maybe. But it seems from history that none of them got a kingdom. They were simply witnesses and most of them died tragic deaths. Therefore it sounds like something they'll get in heaven—which agrees with the other verses.

But it goes way beyond the disciples. It applies to you and me as well. Jesus wants us to know that we have a kingdom, too. Look at the rewards that are given out in His parable in Luke:

*While they were listening to this, He went on to tell them a parable, because He was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once. He said:*

*“A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have Himself appointed king and then to return. So He called ten of His servants and gave them ten minas. ‘Put this money to work,’ He said, ‘until I come back.’ But His subjects hated Him and sent a delegation after Him to say, ‘We don’t want this man to be our king.’ He was made king, however, and returned home. Then He sent for the servants to whom He had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it. The first one came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned ten more.’ ‘Well done, my good servant!’ His master replied. ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.’ (Luke 19:11-17)*

When I first heard this as a new believer, I thought “ten cities” was code for “you will be richly rewarded.” Take the amount of money that would be needed to create ten cities and you’ll have that much money. I assumed Jesus didn’t literally mean cities. But it can be taken very literally. “Take charge of ten cities.” If we are going to rule over nations, it could very well mean cities. This is simply one more reflection of God living out and showing off His grace for all eternity!

It is because of this concept that the writer of Hebrews talks about us as “sharing in” Christ.

*See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first. (Hebrews 3:12-14)*

That actual Greek verb “to share” is *metochos*. It can mean “sharing in, partaking, a partner (as in a work, office or dignity).” We find the same verb used in Luke 5:

*They signaled to their partners (*metochos*) in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats so that they began to sink. (Luke 5:7)*

There it is translated “partners” and clearly communicates some sense of equality (though we’ll never come close to being completely equal to Jesus). So Hebrews 3:14 could accurately be translated, “We have come to be partners with Christ.” How will we be partnering with Christ? By ruling and reigning with Him forever on His throne!

## Old Testament

This idea of ruling and reigning is not something we only find in the New Testament. It was actually hinted at long ago in the Old Testament. But the hints came slowly.

The first hint came in the first commandment to humanity.

*God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” (Genesis 1:28)*

Rule? We’re supposed to rule? Yes. Very few people know it but it was a foreshadowing of things to come in Eternity Future. God is saying, “I want to see how you do here on earth before I have you rule in Eternity Future.”

Much later the prophet Isaiah spoke of a time when there would be universal peace. Though differences would still arise between nations, they would be settled by One on the throne. There would no be military conflict.

*In the last days the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.” The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. (Isaiah 2:2-4)*

The prophet Micah also spoke in these terms:

*In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and peoples will stream to it. Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. (Micah 4:1-3)*

Later on, Isaiah spoke of "a new heaven and a new earth." Hence the Jews knew something different was going to be on the horizon. Everything would eventually be totally new. There would be a new way of looking at life, new leadership—a whole new kingdom.

*See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. (Isaiah 65:17-19)*

As this hazy understanding of a new paradigm was being debated by the rabbis of those days, Daniel added more variables for them to consider. As he interpreted a dream, a small "bomb-shell" was dropped before them:

*As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them, until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom. (Daniel 7:21,22)*

The rabbis were probably stunned with the idea that God's

people are going to possess the kingdom. The “kingdom” is where a king rules and reigns. And note, it is not “a” kingdom, but “*the*” kingdom. Although we normally view this as being here on the earth, the kingdom implies something far greater!

The rabbis may have been wondering, “Will it be a kingdom during time as we know it or of another time?” Their answer came a few verses later as they read that we will possess it forever!

*Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey Him.’ (Daniel 7:27)*

Today we understand this to mean that we, sinners, who have been made saints by the grace of God lavished on us, *will be given an everlasting kingdom!* And the rabbis somehow had this idea as well. We know this because they passed it down from generation to generation—spilling over into the New Testament! But their understanding of the kingdom was incorrect.

## **The Disciples**

When Jesus came on the scene, the Jews were being treated cruelly by the Romans. The Jews were no more than slaves to be abused at will. Herod’s order to kill all of the Hebrew boys two years of age and younger is ample proof of the abuse they took (Matthew 2:16). Because of this, they were anxiously awaiting a Messiah to establish the kingdom.

The thought of establishing the kingdom that would rule over all was more than enticing. Anything that could give them that hope would have set their souls on fire. In fact, the very word salvation to the average Jew back then did not mean “eternal salvation” as we know it today, but rather “political deliverance” or “societal emancipation.”

Look at how Jewish souls at the time of Jesus could have been rekindled with Zachariah’s prophecy over John the Baptist in Luke chapter 1.

*Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he*



*has come to his people and redeemed them. <sup>69</sup> He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David <sup>70</sup> (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), <sup>71</sup> salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us— <sup>72</sup> to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, <sup>73</sup> the oath he swore to our father Abraham: <sup>74</sup> to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear <sup>75</sup> in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. (Luke 1:68-75)*

Verses 71 and 74 would light up the ears of beaten down Jews. “Wow, maybe this is the Messiah or maybe he is going to point us to the Messiah! Maybe our dreams will become a reality soon! Maybe we’ll finally get to kick out these Romans and all our oppressors and establish the kingdom where we will get to rule forever!”

They thought Jesus might have been this Messiah.

*Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. <sup>23</sup> All the people were astonished and said, “Could this be the Son of David?” (Matthew 12:22,23)*

“Son of David” is code for Messiah. Seeing Jesus do these miracles, they were thinking, “Could this be the Messiah who is going to establish the kingdom that will rule over all of our enemies?”

The miracles kept pointing the Jews to the idea that Jesus was to be the Messiah, which they understood as a political king who would rule over all. After feeding the 5,000 in John chapter 6, look what they tried to do to Jesus:

*Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself. (John 6:15)*

They were so hungry to be free—so desiring the kingdom here on earth—they wanted to make Jesus king. They would then begin a rebellion that would free them from the Roman rule.

There was a time when Jesus did accept their worship as “king.” Though they may have been thinking one thing (a political king), he received it as another (a spiritual king).

*“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!” “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.” (Luke 19:38-40)*

But most felt that Jesus was going to usher in the political kingdom—and it would be soon. No wonder one of the mothers asked:

*Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. “What is it you want?” he asked. She said, “Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.” (Matthew 20:20,21)*

She wasn’t thinking of the heavenly kingdom. She was thinking of the kingdom here on the earth—the fulfillment of their interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies of a kingdom that would rule over all and last forever here on this earth.

Jesus told her that was up to His Father.<sup>2</sup>

The kingdom that the prophets and Jesus referenced dealt with God’s eternal kingdom. It is the kingdom we receive after we die. But Jesus certainly gave what seemed to be mixed messages during his time here on the earth—implying it was to be a kingdom here and now. Look at Luke 22:

*Then Jesus asked them, “When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?” “Nothing,” they answered. He said to them, “But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don’t have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one. (Luke 22:35,36)*

You can just imagine the disciple’s minds beginning to spin.

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 20:23

“Buy a sword? This is fantastic! Let the revolution begin! Let’s establish *the* kingdom!”

But before they could recruit their first soldier, an abrupt halt was put to it.

*The disciples said, “See, Lord, here are two swords.”  
“That’s enough!” he replied. (Luke 22:38)*

“That’s enough? Jesus, are you crazy? We’re going to need hundreds of thousands of swords, not to mention chariots and horses and...”

Because of their great expectations for a coming political kingdom, they were blind to the idea that it could be a spiritual kingdom first. Finally, all hopes were completely dashed when Jesus was crucified. No more Jesus. No more kingdom. No victory over the enemy. Back to the same abuse from the Roman soldiers. What a let down. What a disappointment.

But then Jesus rose from the dead.

“Oh yes, praise God,” thought the disciples. “Now we understand, you had to conquer death itself before you could establish our political rule. This is phenomenal!” Look at Acts 1:6:

*Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6)*

In other words, “Lord, is it now time to pick up our swords and defeat the Romans? Is it at this time we are going to get the kingdom promised by the prophets of old?”

They still didn’t get it. They still hoped that the Messiah would bring about the political victory, not the spiritual victory.

And they based all of their hope on the prophecies of the Old Testament. It was the prophets who said that a kingdom was coming for Israel from the throne of David that would have them rule over all their enemies.

But that’s not where Jesus was going—at least not yet. Yes, there would be a kingdom like that, but not at this time here on the earth.<sup>3</sup> It would be a heavenly kingdom, with thrones, power,

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<sup>3</sup> Depending upon your eschatological viewpoint, some will say that this will be the 1,000 year reign of Christ here on this earth after the

rulers and authority. The disciples would play a role in it. Jesus said to them:

*Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Matthew 19:28)*

But it was not to be in the life they were living then.

Here's the bottom line. The disciples, and Jews as a whole, were expecting the kingdom. They were anticipating it. They were excited. But they had it wrong. Now that we have it right—it is not going to be a political kingdom on this old earth, but a spiritual kingdom and eventually a spiritual/physical kingdom when the new earth is here—we should be anticipating it and excited about it too.

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seven year tribulation. Though that may be right, I'm addressing the kingdom in heaven where there will be thrones, governors, rulers, etc.

## Chapter 4: Recorded Versus Rewarded

To understand why we should be excited about and expecting the kingdom, we need to look again at the Scriptures that talk about us ruling and reigning with Him. In taking a second look, we're going to find something that may take us by surprise.

*To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. (Revelation 3:21)*

*To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations. (Revelation 2:26)*

*If we endure, we will also reign with him. (2 Timothy 2:12)*

*The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Romans 8:16,17)*

Each one of these passages has some kind of “works” associated with it. In Revelation 3, it is very specific. The only one who gets to sit with Christ on His throne is the one who is “victorious.”

“Victorious” in the Greek is *nikeō*. (Yes, that's where Nike™ gets its name.) It is defined as:

- to conquer, to carry off the victory, come off victorious,
- of Christ, victorious over all His foes,
- of Christians, that hold fast their faith even unto death against the power of their foes, and temptations and persecutions,
- when one is arraigned or goes to law, to win the case,

maintain one's cause

It is used 28 times in 24 verses in the NASB.<sup>4</sup> Luke 11:22 uses it this way:

*But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder. (Luke 11:22)*

Note that the word there is translated “overpowers.” It is in the context of attacking someone. There is a strong sense of struggle.

John 16:33 also uses the same Greek word:

*I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)*

Jesus overcame the world through great struggles in going to the cross. It wasn't easy. In fact it was quite hard. He sweat drops of blood over the whole thing.<sup>5</sup> Hmm, definitely a struggle there.

Revelation 2:26 also uses *nikeō*, but it gives us an additional meaning. Not only are we to struggle, but we are also to struggle *to the end*. It seems to hint at the fact that the only way you will experience this lavished grace for all eternity is if you stay firm in your Jesus walk until the day you die!

The passage we looked at in 2 Timothy 2:12 speaks of enduring. This Greek word is different. It is *hypomenō*. It is defined as:

- to remain i.e. abide, not recede or flee to persevere: under misfortunes and trials to hold fast to one's faith in Christ,
- to endure, bear bravely and calmly: ill treatments<sup>6</sup>

Once again, we see the idea of struggling and perseverance. It speaks directly to doing this in the midst of trials and misfor-

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G3528&t=>

<sup>5</sup> Luke 22:44

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G5278&t=>

tunes. Wow, that sounds tough.

That same Greek verb is used in Matthew 10:

*You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. (Matthew 10:22)*

Dang. More struggle, and now in the context of people hating us. And what's worse is that only if we stand firm to the end will we be saved.

The passage in Romans spells it out even further. We will only be heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ "if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."

The word sufferings is *sympaschō*. It is defined as:

- to suffer or feel pain together; to suffer evils (troubles, persecutions) in the like manner with another<sup>7</sup>

This Greek verb, *sympaschō*, is only used two places in the New Testament. The other place is found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

*If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. (1 Corinthians 12:26)*

Ouch. More suffering—and now we have to suffer with others. We are not going to share in the glory of Christ (Romans 8:17) unless we suffer and share in the suffering of others.

Shoot! I thought we were ***saved by faith alone***.

## Recorded versus Rewarded

I never want to minimize the depth and wisdom of God's Word, but there is actually an easy way of understanding the difference between salvation by faith alone and all of these works passages. This simplicity can be understood by carefully reading what Peter is saying about our inheritance.

*<sup>3</sup>Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus*

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G4841&t=>

*Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3-5)*

Peter speaks about a “new birth” and an “inheritance.” The conjunctive “and” implies the new birth and the inheritance are *two different references*. Many theologians believe that being born again and getting your inheritance is synonymous with going to heaven. In other words, your inheritance is heaven.

But if you read it carefully, it can't be. Why? Because verse 4 says that the inheritance is kept in heaven for you.

*This inheritance is kept in heaven for you.... (1 Peter 1:4b)*

If it is *in* heaven, it can't be heaven itself. It has to be something different.

Once I saw certain theologians write about this, I finally understood the difference between our names being “recorded in heaven” and us being “rewarded in heaven.”

Having our names recorded in heaven means having a relationship with God. It begins with us putting our faith in Jesus Christ to take away our sins. It means being born again. It is our ticket to heaven. In simple terms, it is the essence of being saved (as most know it today)—having a relationship with Christ. This is what Peter is talking about when he says God has given us a “new birth.”

Being rewarded in heaven is something totally different. This is something that takes place after we get to heaven. In other words, once we come to know the Lord, God is basically saying, “Now that you've got a relationship with Me, I want to reward you for every good deed you do.” This is the inheritance that God is keeping for us in heaven—which leads to the kingdom! That's why Peter used the word “and” (the beginning of verse 4) showing they were two different things.

Earning your inheritance—working for rewards—has



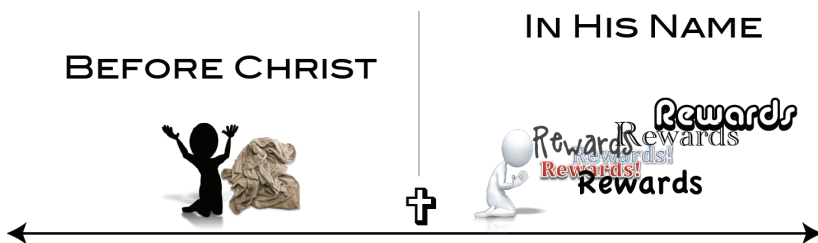
nothing to do with having your sins taken away. No one can do anything to earn his or her way to heaven—it is solely by grace. But you do earn your inheritance through good works. This has everything to do with being rewarded for a life well lived.

“Wait,” you might be thinking to yourself. “I thought all of our good works were like ‘filthy rags’ to God.”

*All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. (Isaiah 64:6)*

Yes, they are filthy rags to God *before* we come to know Him. But *after* we come to know Him and learn how to work in the power of His Holy Spirit in His name, they become good works. These works earn us an inheritance.

*Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward. (Mark 9:41)*



Sin “trumps” good deeds. God hides His face from those whose sins have not been covered<sup>8</sup>—even if we worship Him falsely.<sup>9</sup> Because He hides His face, He doesn’t reward us. That’s why our gifts are like filthy rags. Only after you have a personal relationship with Christ will God begin to reward you for the things you’ve done.

In plain and simple terms, God wants to reward us for a life well lived. But we have to start first with a relationship with Him.

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 59:2

<sup>9</sup> Isaiah 29:13

## My Journey

I first learned the difference between our names being “recorded in heaven” and being “rewarded in heaven” from Joseph Dillow, though Randy Alcorn and Bruce Wilkinson were key in understanding the rewards God wants to give us.

Joseph Dillow started my thinking regarding all of this when he pointed out the difference between “entering” the kingdom and “inheriting” the kingdom. Again, many theologians have historically made no differentiation between the two. Even today, most do not. (That’s why you may have pastors, parents, or friends who disagree with this book!) They believe that Jesus’ use of “enter” and “inherit” both mean getting into heaven.

*And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:3)*

*Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.” (Matthew 25:34)*

The first one—which talks about entering—deals with faith. Little children have faith. The second one—which talks about inheriting—deals with works: “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

The difference between “entering” and “inheriting” was found in his first version of *Reign of the Servant Kings*. (In his later revised book, he veers away from this simplification since “inherit” and “entering” can be used for both being “recorded” and “rewarded” in heaven.)

But his reason for beginning with the distinction of “inheriting the kingdom” (which still holds true for many passages) was the breakthrough for me.

## The Jewish Inheritance

To properly understand the significance of our inheritance, you've got to keep in mind what the average Jew thought about an inheritance in the days of Jesus. Why? Because the context and meaning of inheritance from the Old Testament shaped the way the disciples would understand it and how Jesus would talk about it. If you can clarify how the disciples understood it and Jesus talked about it, you'll comprehend Jesus' teaching on inheritance a lot better.

To the average Old Testament Jew, the Promised Land (in their minds the kingdom) was their inheritance.

*Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to perform, so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. (Deuteronomy 4:1)*

*Because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them. And He personally brought you from Egypt by His great power, driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in and to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is today. (Deuteronomy 4:37,38)*

The Promised Land was promised to the generation coming out of bondage from Egypt. It was to be their inheritance. Jesus spoke about an inheritance a lot. So when He talked about it, this reference is what the disciples would understand. It was about the Promised Land—the kingdom.

But notice that there were stipulations put on the Promised Land. It had to be earned.

*Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. (Joshua 1:6,7)*

In this passage, they were told to be “strong and courageous.” They were also told to be “careful to do according to all the law which Moses...commanded you.” Note the word “all.” To reinforce it a second time, God told them to “not turn from it to the right or the left.”

Wow. When I read that text early on in my Christian life, it sent chills down my back because there was no way I was doing “all” that God commanded. Was I really going to heaven? I knew I was saved (99% sure), but the words “all” and “not turning from the left and right” put a 1% doubt in my mind. The doubt was there because I knew I wasn't perfect.

But there were even more stipulations for gaining their inheritance.

*Do what is right and good in the Lord's sight, so that it may go well with you and you may go in and take over the good land the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors. (Deuteronomy 6:18)*

*But the land into which you are about to cross to possess it... It shall come about, if you listen obediently to my commandments which I am commanding you today, to love the LORD your God and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul. (Deuteronomy 11:11-13)*

This caused my 1% of doubt to grow to 5%! I knew I wanted to love God with all of my heart and soul—and I was even commanded by Jesus to do this. But there were tons of times when I slipped. I failed by having wrong thoughts, by being prideful, by letting my anger burst out when it shouldn't have. Was I really obedient to God's commands like He wanted me to be? Was I really going to get to heaven? (Too bad back then I never saw the difference between my name being “recorded in heaven” and being “rewarded in heaven.” I could have had a lot more peace!)

Because of these verses (the context about the Promised Land), the disciples knew that when Jesus spoke of an inheritance, it was something that had to be earned. But, they also knew there was a potential to lose it.

## Not Getting Their Inheritance

When the Exodus generation of Jews (the ones who left Egypt and went through the desert) got to the edge of the Promised Land, they sent in twelve spies to check it out (Numbers 13:1-25). The entire spying expedition took 40 days. They came back with fruit and reported that it was a bountiful land—but well fortified.

*We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan. (Numbers 13:27-29)*

Caleb, one of the twelve spies, said that they should go and conquer the land “for we can certainly do it” (Numbers 13:30). He spoke for himself and Joshua.

But the ten others had a different perspective.

*But the men who had gone up with him said, “We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are.” And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, “The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.” (Numbers 13:31-33)*

So here sat the rest of the Israelites. They had a choice to make. Would they follow the two spies who said “we can do it.” Or would they follow the ten spies who said, “We are like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.”

Remember, God had already said, “You can have the Promised Land if you are strong and courageous. ...Don’t turn to the left or right. ...Do all I command you.”

So what did the Israelites choose to do? They chose to wimp

out and sided with the ten.

*If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt? (Numbers 14:2,3)*

They were not strong. They were not courageous. They did not live up to God's stipulations for getting into the Promised Land.

What was the result? They lost the right to enter into the Promised Land.

*The Lord replied, "I have forgiven them, as you asked. Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth, not one of those who saw my glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times—not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their ancestors. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it. (Numbers 14:20-23)*

But if you are unaware, Joshua and Caleb did get into the Promised Land. Why? Because they were strong and courageous and obeyed the Lord fully. They were the ones who said, "We can do this!"

*But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it. (Numbers 14:24)*

## **Salvation?**

Did the Promised Land represent "salvation" to the twelve disciples? Absolutely not.

The disciples, and the Jews back in the first century, didn't worry about whether or not they were going to heaven. They never pondered the question "Have I invited God into my heart?" They assumed they were going to heaven—saved. It was a for-

gone conclusion because they were God's chosen people. Who else did God give his laws to?<sup>10</sup> Who else did God speak to out of a fire?<sup>11</sup> Who else had ten plagues given to an enemy nation to free them?<sup>12</sup>

The bigger question was, "When was the kingdom of God—with David's throne being established forever—going to take place on the earth? When were they going to take back control of the Promised Land that had been promised to them?"

What did they have to do to get it back?

## Something Earned

So what do we learn from these Old Testament passages? When the disciples heard Jesus speak about an inheritance, they immediately referenced the Promised Land. And when they thought about the Promised Land, they knew it was something to be earned. You couldn't follow God half-heartedly. You couldn't follow God "most of the way." You had to fully obey the Lord.

So when they heard Jesus say "take your inheritance" and then immediately referenced works ("for I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me") it made perfect sense to them. Their inheritance had to be earned. And at the same time, they knew it could be lost.

We too need to learn that when Jesus speaks of an inheritance, it is going to mean action in some way shape or form. Whatever it means, we are going to have to earn it—or it will be lost. And that has tremendous ramifications on our relationship with God.

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<sup>10</sup> Psalm 147:20

<sup>11</sup> Deuteronomy 4:33

<sup>12</sup> Exodus 7-14

If I'm Saved By Grace, Why Bother With Works?



## Chapter 5: Child of God or Friend of God?

When I talk to my Muslim friends here in Richmond, I constantly have to differentiate between those who call themselves Christians and those who act like Christians. If they don't get it, I turn the tables on them. "Are all Muslims good Muslims?" When they are honest (usually alone!) their answer is quickly "no." They do know the difference.

Just about all believers know this about Christians too. That is why we are forced to be creative when referencing certain believers. Some we call "strong Christians," while others we might call "mature Christians." Some people use the term "spiritual giants" while others use the term "grounded in the Word." To contrast those, we might call others "babes in Christ" or "young." *What we are communicating is that there can be a spectrum in our relationship with God.* Some have a relationship with God and are mature. Some have a relationship with God and are immature.

### **Immature Christians**

Indirectly, the Bible is constantly telling us that there are immature believers in the church. It does this by giving a challenge to become mature believers. A perfect example is found in Paul's writings. He says that our goal in helping other believers is to move them from immaturity to maturity.

*Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. (Colossians 1:28)*

If it is our goal to present everyone as mature in Christ, it must mean that we are starting out immature. Therefore Paul is indirectly saying that there are immature believers in the church. And he wants you and me (and all believers) to move from immaturity to maturity in Christ.

Paul saw the Corinthians as immature. He called them "babes" or "infants" in Christ.

*Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. (1 Corinthians 3:2)*

To the Philippians, Paul indirectly references the immature believers as people who “think otherwise.”

*Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. (Philippians 3:15)*

To the Ephesians he said it a bit differently. He speaks about “mature” and “grow.” Note, too, the reference about “children.”

*until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. <sup>14</sup> Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup> Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. (Ephesians 4:13-15)*

Paul equates the immature Christians to children who are tossed back and forth by every wind of doctrine. They are the ones who need milk.

James speaks of maturity (implying immaturity), but says it a bit differently. He points out that all testing that goes on in our lives is geared toward making us perfect (mature).

*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, <sup>3</sup> for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. <sup>4</sup> And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4)*

If the steadfastness doesn't have its full effect, what is the result? There are people who are “lacking—not perfect—not

complete.” They are immature. They are the children—the babes in Christ. (It doesn’t take too long to see who these people are in the churches today.)

## Two Walks

Paul expounds on the extremes in these two types of Christians when writing to the Romans. His differentiation between the two is found in Romans chapter eight. And at first glance, it would look like he is describing a non-believer to a believer. But a closer look at verse 12 shows that he is not. He is addressing believers and is clearly saying that believers have two choices. They can either walk in the flesh or according to the Spirit:

*Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. (1 Corinthians 8:12)<sup>13</sup>*

Paul clearly seems to be saying that we believers have a choice. We can walk according to the flesh (and be immature) or walk according to the Spirit (and be mature). He maps out the differences in the eighth chapter of Romans.

	<u>Mature Spiritual Christian</u>	<u>Immature Carnal Christian</u>
8:4	walks according to the Spirit	walks according to the flesh
8:5	sets mind on Spirit	sets mind on flesh
8:6	life and peace	death
8:7	(at peace with God) (obeys God)	hostile to God unable to obey God
8:12	Puts to death the deeds of the body	lives according to the flesh
8:13	Those being led by the Spirit of God	Those who walk according to the flesh
8:17	joint-heirs of Christ	Those who do not suffer

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<sup>13</sup> Paul gives the same admonition to the Galatians. “So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you (*believers*) will not gratify the desires of the flesh. – Galatians 5:16

Because Paul planted so many churches, he didn't stay in one place very long but would return and visit. While visiting his churches, he saw mature and immature believers. He wanted the immature to grow. His writings constantly challenge those people to learn to walk in the Spirit—to mature.

So I am stating what is obvious! There are mature and immature believers.<sup>14</sup> Either is possible for those claiming to know Christ here on this earth.

## Conditional Fellowship

But being a mature believer doesn't happen without effort. It takes time. It takes work. It takes obedience. You need to “overcome” (*nikeo*) and be a “Nike™ Christian.”

It is because of this that we see conditional statements by Jesus.

*You are my friends if you do what I command. (John 15:14)*

Note the word “if.” Jesus says, “If you do what I command, you will then be My friend.” Implication, “If you don't do what I command, you are not My friend.” Wow, that sounds works oriented and very conditional. If you think this passage means we have to do good works to get into heaven, you are wrong. Jesus isn't talking about salvation. If He were, then salvation is based on works, which goes against other Scriptures.

It is talking about being mature and therefore being a friend of God. To be mature, you need to be obedient to what Jesus commands. If you are obedient, you have good fellowship with God. Yes, it requires work. And yes, fellowship with God on a daily basis is conditional.

This conditional fellowship also carries over into eternity, which you'll see in Chapters 11 and 12 of this book.

## Warnings

Because there can be immature believers in the church—and a loss of fellowship with God (with eternal ramifications), we

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<sup>14</sup> Did I really have to go over all that Scripture to point this out? Most people know this instinctively! ☺

find many warnings in God's Word to strive to be a mature believer. The Bible is rampant with these exhortations. And most of them deal with "works."

*Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. (2 Peter 1:10,11)*

### **Works: Practicing qualities**

*For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. (Galatians 5:1)*

### **Works: Standing firm, don't get back into slavery**

*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12)*

### **Works: Obeying with fear and trembling**

*Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. (Hebrews 2:1)*

### **Works: Paying close attention**

*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. (Hebrews 10:23)*

### **Works: Holding fast without wavering**

*It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.<sup>20</sup> But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit,<sup>21</sup> keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. (Jude 19-21)*

**Works: Build yourselves up...praying in the Holy Spirit...keeping yourselves in the love of God**

I used to always think that these warnings were focused on my salvation. If I didn't do these things, I would either lose my salvation or I never had it in the first place. Whew, did that ever put a damper on life! If I slipped and fell for whatever reason, I could never really be sure of anything in my walk with God.

But now I know that these warnings are not about losing (or never having had) salvation. Rather it is about keeping my fellowship with God strong. It is about being a friend of Jesus. It is about walking in the power of the Spirit on a day-to-day basis and guarding that. (Wow! I really am saved and just need to keep my fellowship with God strong!)

## Children and Children

The Greek language has a better way of expressing the fact that there are mature believers (what I'm calling "Nike™ Christians") and immature believers, because the Greek language has multiple words for children. In the English language there is only one word: children. In the Greek, there are three words: *teknon*, *huois* and *paidion*. How they are used helps us see a difference in how God views His own children.

*Paidion* is a Greek word representing a young child, like a little boy or girl. This was the term used when the disciples kept children from coming to Jesus.

*Jesus said, "Let the little children (paidion) come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Matthew 19:14)*

In how *paidion* is used, there really isn't anything that stands out. With this word, the Greek language wants you to think of a 5-10 year old, but not a baby or a toddler. But how the other two Greek words are used, there are tremendous ramifications.

The Greek word *teknon* references a generic young child that is a descendant. There is no reference to anything special about this child. They are just a young child who is a descendant of someone. But you get the idea that the child is dependent upon those taking care of it. You find this term used in this passage:

*Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children (teknon) of God.... (John 1:12)*

If we are a child (descendant) of God, we are dependent upon God for eternal salvation.

Now the Greek word *huois* can sometimes be used for a simple child, but it seems to reference more than dependence. It seems to be referencing a child who somehow seems to be obedient or a follower of someone or something. As a result, it goes beyond dependence. It speaks of a maturity in what one is passionate about. This Greek word is therefore found in places like the following:

*You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy." <sup>44</sup> But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> that you may be children (huois) of your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:43-45a)*

Note "works" is required here to be called this type of child of God. You have to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. In fact, in many of its uses, you'll always find works associated with it.

It was used of Jesus.

*And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son (huois), whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:17)*

### **What were His works? Obedience unto death.**

It is also used for those who are actively helping make peace.

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children (huois) of God. (Matthew 5:9)*

### **Works: You must be peacemakers**

Paul uses it to refer to those who are led by God. (And remember, if you are being led by God, you are mature.)





## What Happens to the Immature?

So what happens to the immature? Do they go to hell? Are they eternally lost? No. They are still believers. Their names are recorded in heaven. But they will not be fruitful as believers here on the earth (they had lost fellowship with God) and they will be judged for not abiding in Christ. They will also lose the rewards God had planned for them since the beginning of time.

You can find a similar analogy in every day life. Even though a parent might be so mad at a child they kick them out of their house (and off of their will), that child still keeps the same last name. They are still their descendant and that will never change.

There are times when God is not happy with our choices and we have rejected the Spirit's control in our lives, but we are still children of God. We are still His descendants.

Jesus speaks directly to this in His analogy to Himself being a vine.

*I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup> He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. <sup>3</sup> You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. (John 15:1-4)*

In the context, it is clear that He is speaking to His disciples. And in the analogy to His disciples He is saying that they can be one of two types of branches. There are those that bear fruit and those that don't bear fruit. Let's focus on the one that doesn't bear fruit. One would assume that this is an immature believer.

Unfortunately many theologians would challenge that last sentence. They believe that the one who doesn't bear fruit is not a believer. (I thought this for the longest time.) This is not correct. Why?

First off, remember He is addressing His disciples. They are the audience. And secondly, notice how Jesus phrases it. He says that the branch that doesn't bear fruit is "in me." "In Christ" (or "in Him") is John's way of saying they have a relationship with

Christ.<sup>15</sup> So they have a relationship with Christ, yet they are not bearing fruit.

What happens to them? They are “cut off.” The Greek word is *airo*. It can accurately be translated “cut off” as the text says, but it can also be accurately translated “lift up.”<sup>16</sup>

If you translate it as “lift up,” *it puts a totally different twist on the meaning*. This new meaning will also make perfect sense—especially to a gardener. Professional gardeners who grow any kind of vined plant know how to mend a branch that has broken away from the vine. You must lift a branch up (by tying it or taping it) so that it makes a strong connection back to the vine. (Simply Google “repair broken branches on a vine” and you’ll see that it can be repaired.) What is the result? The branch can be mended easily and continue to grow—drawing life from the vine.

What Christ is saying is that if you are in Him and not bearing fruit, His Father is going to lovingly “lift you up” so that you can grow back in Christ. There is going to be some sort of divine encouragement. The Father is going to be pushing and prodding you to draw your life from Him and not the world. God wants you bearing fruit. (This is how He is glorified—John 15:8.)

Remember, the main focus of this entire exhortation is to “remain in Me so that you can bear fruit.”

Verses five and six tell us what happens when they are lifted up but do not respond to His Father’s divine encouragement.

*I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. (John 15:5,6)*

The “withering” communicates that the branch is not drawing life from the vine. It was “lifted up” but the lifting did not “take.” They never learned to reconnect with the vine. They are

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<sup>15</sup> John 2:11, 3:15, 3:16-18, 4:39, 6:40, 7:31, 7:39, 8:40, 9:36, 11:45, 11:48, 12:11, 12:37

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G142&t=NIV>

acting on their own—in their own power and strength. They are walking in the flesh and not in the Spirit. They are acting immaturely. As a result, they are not bearing fruit. What is the result? They are picked up, thrown in to the fire, and burned.

The words “thrown away” come from a Greek word, *ekballo*. That verb can easily mean that it is against the will of that person. The person being thrown away isn't happy. They are being “kicked out” by God. They want all the benefits of being a friend of Jesus, but they aren't willing to pay the price.

They are then thrown into the fire. Does this mean hell? Joseph Dillow writes, “Fire is a common symbol in the Bible for the judgment of God's people in time. Only rarely and exceptionally is it associated with the fire of hell.”<sup>17</sup> So no, this is not necessarily referencing hell. It is referencing the judgment fire in 1 Corinthians 3:

*...their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work.*  
(1 Corinthians 3:13)

Because they are believers, Jesus could be saying, “*Since you didn't respond to the divine encouragement by My Father and you still don't abide in Me, you will be on your own. Our fellowship will be broken. You are choosing to not abide in Me. You are acting immaturely. And you were supposed to bear fruit. But now that fruit will never come about. The whole purpose for your life will be burned up before your eyes because you didn't abide in Me and bear fruit.*”

The mature bear fruit. The immature have broken fellowship with God and don't bear fruit. Their life's purpose and works burn up.

## **A Loss Of Inheritance**

The end-result of a judgment fire to the immature can be seen very clearly in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. In order to see it, you need to understand the context of what is happening in the letter.

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<sup>17</sup> *Reign of the Servant Kings*, Joseph Dillow, pg 412

Notice what he writes in the opening verses:

*To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours....*  
(1 Corinthians 1:2)

Did you catch that he is writing to two types of people *in the church of God*? There are those he is writing to whom he believes are sanctified. They are walking according to the Spirit. In our terminology we would call them mature, Nike™ Christians and “friends of Jesus.” But then he refers to *a second group*. He adds, “Together with those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours.”

But why did he make a distinction? Until you read further into the letter, you wouldn't know. But once you do read the letter, it becomes clear. He is writing to a second group whom *he doesn't believe are sanctified*. In fact, they are quite dysfunctional and messed up. We would call them immature—babes in Christ. Some would even call them non-believers.

Here's a list of some of the things they were doing:

- There were quarrels among them. (1 Corinthians 1:11, 1 Corinthians 3:1)
- Paul implies they could be deceived. (1 Corinthians 3:18)
- They were boasting about their leaders. (1 Corinthians 3:21)
- Others were arrogant. (1 Corinthians 4:18)
- There is sexual immorality among them. (1 Corinthians 5:1)
- They are associating with immoral and greedy people. Others are swindlers and idolaters. (1 Corinthians 5:9)
- They are suing one another. (1 Corinthians 6:7)
- They felt they had the right to engage with prostitutes. (1 Corinthians 6:12-16)
- There are divisions among them in the church. (1 Corinthians 11:18)

- They were thinking like children. (1 Corinthians 14:20)

Wow, that really does sound like non-believers, right? But remember, Paul says that they are believers—even those who are being sexually immoral.

What's happening to these people who are walking in the flesh and doing these terrible things? Are they losing their salvation? I would say no. They are not losing their salvation, but they are losing their inheritance. This is what Paul is emphasizing for the Corinthians.

After listing many of the wrongs they were doing, Paul writes these words:

*Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men<sup>18</sup> <sup>10</sup>nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9,10)*

I want to challenge you: these people weren't in danger of losing their salvation. They were in danger of losing their inheritance—the kingdom God had prepared for them since the beginning of time. This is what Paul is trying to get them to see. They are children of God, but not friends of God.

## Benefits

So what are the benefits of being a friend of God besides gaining your inheritance?

Before finding the answers in God's Word, you probably already know a few things. If you know of mature believers in your church, you've seen some of those benefits.

- They have a deep knowledge of God and a deep love for God.
- Their lives aren't perfect, but their problems seem insignificant compared to yours.
- If they do have significant problems, those problems don't "derail them." Their faith remains strong.

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<sup>18</sup> See Appendix B

- They keep on a steady pace walking in the Spirit.
- They are usually kinder, more loving, and they seem to have more joy.

Those are just a few of the benefits that are observed. But what does the Bible say?

God's Word communicates that there are some clear benefits. Paul writes about the fruit of the Spirit to the Ephesians. This fruit is something you'll see in mature believers.

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. (Galatians 5:22,23)*

This verse alone is enough to make us want to pursue being a friend of God. Who doesn't want love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control in their lives?

But the writer of Hebrews throws in a zinger, which is both pleasant and unpleasant!

*Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children (huois). For what children (huois) are not disciplined by their father? (Hebrews 12:7)*

Ouch. If we are a friend of God, we will be disciplined. Not sure if we want that all together, but knowing God is good, it must be good for us, so, okay, we can accept that one.

Jesus referenced the benefits of being a friend this way:

*I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. (John 15:15)*

Put in simple terms, those who are friends of Jesus (Nike™ Christians) know what God is doing. They have a "big picture vision." Jesus gives them the "inside scoop" on what the Father has going on.

(You and I both know of Christians who have a relationship with God but who have no idea what is really going on in life. They are happily going about living the great American dream,

pursuing the “things” of life, and are blind to what is on God’s heart. This is because they aren’t friends of Jesus. Jesus hasn’t revealed to them what the Father has made known to Him. They are very immature.)

John quotes Jesus saying the same thing, though a bit differently, below:

*Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them. (John 14:21)*

The ones who know Jesus’ commands and keep them are being obedient. They are certainly led by the Spirit. What is the result of being a *houis* child? Jesus shows Himself to them. That translates into a closer and deeper relationship with God.

Jesus even went one step further. Not only does He reveal Himself and His Father’s will to His friends, but He seems to be communicating that they are “family” to Him:

*While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. <sup>47</sup> Someone told him, “Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.” <sup>48</sup> He replied to him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” <sup>49</sup> Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. <sup>50</sup> For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” (Matthew 12:48-50)*

Jesus seems to be communicating that He has two sets of family. There are those who are related to Him through flesh and blood. They are descendants. Those are His immediate brothers (and sisters) and mother. But the second category is another type of family. This seems to be an intimate family. There are those who are obedient to His Father in heaven. Those are the ones who do the will of His Father. They are the mature believers—Nike™ Christians.

Many theologians will say that all of those who accept Christ into their lives are believers—and therefore a part of God’s family. And to that I would agree. But they would insist that

every one of them is a friend of God as well—"family" as Jesus is referencing in Matthew 12:50 in the above passage. And to that I would disagree. The Scriptures seem to indicate that there are many Christians who are not doing God's will. They are believers—but they are immature babes and not considered "intimate family" by Jesus.

A final benefit is amazing. We've already seen it—and it is a part of our inheritance. Those who are mature (*huois*—obedient—friends of Jesus) get to rule and reign with Him forever on His throne.

*To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. (Revelation 3:21)*

Although I really don't know what that means, I do know that it sounds pretty cool!

## **How To Move To Maturity**

How does one move from immaturity to maturity? The writer of Hebrews lets us know:

*We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. <sup>12</sup>In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's Word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! <sup>13</sup>Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. <sup>14</sup>But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. (Hebrews 5:12-14)*

What "constant use" have they done? They've put into practice what they've learned. It's a form of works. And by doing that on a steady basis, they've learned to distinguish between good and evil.

Isaiah says the same thing, but in a different way.

*"You are my witnesses," declares the Lord, "and my*



*servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he.*" (Isaiah 43:10a)

Be God's witnesses and servants, and then you will know and understand God.

Some might argue and say, "Yeah, but Jesus shows Himself to everyone who chooses to follow Him. If you give your life to Him, He is going to reveal it *all* to you."

That is not true.

In the book of John, everywhere you see the words, "believed in Him" or "believed in His name" (John 3:18, 6:40, 7:39, 8:30, 10:42, 11:25, 11:26 and 12:11) always references having a saving faith. A clear example of this is found right after one of the most quoted verses in the Bible. Notice, too, that no works are involved, only faith:

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. <sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, (John 3:16-18a)*

So John always uses the phrase "believing in Him" to reference a saving faith. Since that is the case, it sheds new light on the following passage.

*Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name. <sup>24</sup> But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. (John 2:23,24)*

Here are people whom John seems to be communicating are believers. They "believed in his name." But Jesus would not "entrust himself to them." What does that phrase mean?

I believe it means that He was not going to trust them with new insight and new knowledge. He wasn't going to reveal Himself, nor His Father's plans to them. He didn't trust in them. He didn't believe in them. Why? Because He knew their hearts. What does "know their hearts" mean?

It means Jesus knew of their future disobedience. Though they trusted in Him for salvation, they weren't going to pay the price of following Him. Based on that knowledge, Jesus wasn't going to reveal Himself to them. He didn't trust them.

We see from Deuteronomy that God knows about future disobedience:

*Then the Lord appeared at the tent in a pillar of cloud, and the cloud stood over the entrance to the tent. <sup>16</sup> And the Lord said to Moses: "You are going to rest with your ancestors, and these people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them."<sup>17</sup> And in that day I will become angry with them and forsake them; I will hide my face from them, and they will be destroyed. Many disasters and calamities will come on them, and in that day they will ask, 'Have not these disasters come on us because our God is not with us?' (Deuteronomy 31:15-17)*

Note the future tense: *will soon prostitute themselves... will forsake me.* God knows our future disobedience. And what happens when He sees they aren't going to obey Him? He hides His face from them. Their lives will be destroyed. (This doesn't necessarily mean go to hell. It means the purpose for which they were created will not be fulfilled.)

This is what is happening in John 2:24. Jesus knew they believed in Him for salvation, but He also knew they weren't going to obey Him. They were immature and didn't want to pay the price of following Him. Therefore He didn't open up to them. He did not entrust Himself to them.

## Quiet Times

While in the Areté testing class, we were talking about maturing as a Christian—becoming a friend of God—and what it would take to get there. The students still didn't seem to get it. So I asked one of the young ladies if she had a boyfriend. She did. So I asked her, "What would it be like if you never saw him? Would your friendship grow?" She replied, "No, it wouldn't." She was beginning to see the importance of having a quiet time.

But I wanted her to go deeper. So I asked, "What would happen if you did all the talking and he never said a thing? Would your relationship grow?" She gave a look of disgust. (I wondered if he was a quiet guy.) Again, no, it would not. I continued, "That's what it's like when we always talk to God throughout the day and yet never open up our Bibles nor study it. We are doing all of the talking. You've got to be having quiet times to hear God speaking to you. He primarily wants to speak to you through His Word." That's when the light bulb went off in her mind.

To help them see it even further, I asked them, "What are some good things that could get in the way of having a quiet time?" There was a pause, so I helped them. "Could wanting to get good grades keep you from having a quiet time?" They all nodded in agreement. "Could having a boyfriend or girlfriend keep you from having quiet times?" Yes. "Could social media keep you from having quiet times?" Yes.

They were getting it. There are lots of good things that can keep you from growing in your relationship with God and keep you from becoming a mature friend of God.

Note this well in the CPU of your soul. Many people are immature children of God because they've never set their priorities in order. The Facebooks and Internet and entertainments this world offers are keeping them from seeking God's face. Don't be like that.

## **Obey**

What have you learned in this chapter? It is simple. Obey what you know, and you will become mature. You will be a friend of God. Jesus will reveal Himself and His Father's plans to you. You will bear fruit. The very purpose for your life will be fulfilled.

Don't obey, and you'll be blinded to all that God has for you. You won't bear fruit. The very purpose for your life will be burned up. You'll be a child of God, but not a friend of God.

If you are playing the game of Christianity but really aren't desiring to be obedient, don't expect God to give you insight. It just isn't going to happen. With all my heart I challenge you: don't waste your life that way.

If I'm Saved By Grace, Why Bother With Works?

## Chapter 6: The Best-Case Scenario

Prior to the summer of 2014, Hunter, our youngest son, needed a job. We talked a lot about his options, and one came from an old family friend named Owen. Owen had lived with us two years earlier. Knowing Hunter needed work, he offered Hunter a job in his new business. This particular job would mean that Hunter would not live with us for the summer, but in another city working for him.

Owen really wanted Hunter to work for him but also knew Hunter didn't want to leave Virginia. Owen also had another strike against him because the job he was offering Hunter was pure commission. He could walk away with \$0 for the summer, plus be out money for food and housing. To ensure Hunter would come, Owen sent Hunter a possible financial scenario of what work could bring in for him.

When I looked at the scenario, I was very impressed—but skeptical at the same time.

I was impressed, because Hunter could have an entire year of college paid for in one summer's job—if he performed like a pro. But I was also skeptical because it didn't show what the average person made that worked for him—much less what the average rookie made. Owen was putting out the best-case scenario.

You would have thought that Owen had learned from Jesus!

### **Best-Case Scenario**

When Jesus spoke about heaven, He had a choice. He could present a gospel that talked primarily about getting into heaven. And oh, by the way, if you do good deeds you will be rewarded. But that's secondary. The key thing is getting into heaven.

Or He could give a gospel that talks about people being mature believers (Nike™ Christians) and not only getting into heaven, but getting their fullest reward possible. His challenge would be to not only trust in Him, but do good deeds to earn a full reward—a kingdom!

Which would you assume Jesus would have done?

I don't know about you, but I think Jesus wanted to put out the best-case scenario possible. He surely talked about heaven and rewards and was challenging us to "perform like a pro." The biggest reason for this is simple.

If we attain the best-case scenario and rule and reign with Him, it will allow God to show off and live out His grace in a far greater way. Anything short of that (getting only half our inheritance or none at all) won't allow God to show off His grace in the greatest way, which is what he desires. (Remember, heaven is more about what God gets than what we get!)

I want to challenge you. In the gospels, Jesus taught for a best-case scenario. Jesus never called anyone simply to get into heaven. He doesn't want you to get in by the skin-of-your-teeth and yet lose your reward. He doesn't want you to get to heaven and have mediocre rewards. He wants you to get to heaven and get your fullest rewards—to get your kingdom.

His gospel spoke not only of getting into heaven, but ruling and reigning with Him forever. He put out a gospel that offered the best-case scenario for us to consider. Getting to heaven is merely the first step—an important one, but only the first step. There is so much more to live for—being a friend of God (a Nike™ Christian) and gaining our inheritance!

*To speak of both, Jesus had to constantly mix the idea of grace and works together. This is why the Bible is full of both grace and works.*

This perspective can make so much sense once you see the difference between having your name recorded in heaven and being rewarded in heaven. And once you see that difference, the Scriptures are a lot easier to understand.

## **Your Full Inheritance**

Jesus clearly understood the difference between entering the kingdom of God and inheriting the kingdom of God.

The Apostle Paul understood the difference between these as well. In Ephesians 2, Paul tells us clearly that salvation cannot be earned.

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup>not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8,9)*

Paul knew that salvation was by grace alone. Yet to the Colossians, he spoke of works—earning their inheritance.

*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, <sup>24</sup>since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. (Colossians 3:23,24)*

He could say both because he understood what Jesus was teaching. There is entering the kingdom and there is inheriting the kingdom. Paul is saying that if we work hard for the Lord, He will reward us. That reward will be our inheritance. But salvation is by grace—a gift of God. Paul knew there was a difference between our names being recorded in heaven and being rewarded in heaven. Paul wrote and taught about a best-case scenario as well.

## **Passages That Talk About Works**

Understanding that our inheritance is something that has to be earned, passages that talk about inheriting the kingdom based on works now make total sense!

Let's look again at Matthew 25 when Jesus speaks about the sheep being rewarded with their inheritance and see how it directly applies to their works.

*Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. <sup>35</sup>For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, <sup>36</sup>I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'*  
(Matthew 25:34-36)

Notice they aren't entering the kingdom, they are getting their inheritance! Jesus is referencing rewards to be given in heaven based on their works. Jesus' words are not dealing with eternal salvation. Jesus is saying, "Because you lived such a good life for Me, your good works have earned you a great inheritance."

"But," someone might say, "the contrast is about going to hell. Therefore this must be about going to heaven, not rewards."

Not so. Jesus is giving them the two extremes: the best-case scenario and the worst-case scenario. He's referencing going to hell (the worst-case scenario) or gaining your full kingdom for a life well lived (the best-case scenario). Yes, there are multiple variables in between, but he's not addressing those.

## Earning Rewards

This idea of earning rewards in heaven is not something a few scholars have made up. It is not a twist on inheriting that was made up. Being rewarded by God is at the very heart of what Jesus taught! Look at what He says will earn us rewards right in the context of the Sermon on the Mount.

*Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. (Matthew 6:1)*

The focus of Jesus' talk in the Sermon on the Mount is on rewards. But He's telling us that if we practice our righteousness in front of others, we won't be rewarded. Why? Because we were living to please people and not God. Therefore we'll get their rewards (a few temporary kudos) but no eternal rewards from God.

In this chapter, Jesus speaks about rewards repeatedly. It's in the DNA of the Sermon on the Mount. Look at what He says next:

*So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup>so that your giving may be in se-*



*cret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Matthew 6:3,4)*

Jesus is still focused on rewards. If we give to the needy, Jesus directs us to give to the needy secretly. Then God will reward you. He says we even get rewarded when we pray:

*And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. <sup>6</sup>But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Matthew 6:5,6)*

Each time you and I have a quiet time, God is keeping track. He is going to reward us. Have you ever fasted? Guess what. You're going to get rewards for that as well!

*When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. <sup>17</sup>But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup>so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Matthew 6:16-18)*

In these passages, Jesus is saying, "If you do these things..." He's not demanding that we do them. They seem optional. But to end the teaching on rewards, Jesus does give us a command. It is quite interesting.

*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup>But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. (Matthew 6:19,20)*

What Jesus does command us to do is to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven! "Treasures." Hmm, that sounds like

rewards. And these can't be heaven itself, because they are rewards in heaven. Because this is a command, Jesus is telling us to be keeping an eye on rewards!

Jesus is saying, "Live with an eternal perspective. Rewards in heaven are worth living for—it is a part of the Father's plan." Lesson learned: we should pursue them!

Rewards are not only found in the Sermon on the Mount, but in other books. Mark, who doesn't even tell the story of the Sermon on the Mount, tells us that the rewards are directly linked to what we do (not our faith).

*Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward. (Mark 9:41)*

Luke helps us see that we will be rewarded if we love our enemies.

*But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. (Luke 6:35)*

Remember, because Jesus wanted us to earn our full kingdom, His message is full of both grace (having our names recorded in heaven) and works (being rewarded in heaven). He wants us to get to heaven by grace, of course. But He also wants us to earn our kingdom prepared for us since the beginning of time.

## **Not All Rewards Are Equal**

Just as there are variations in being mature and immature, Jesus also indicates that there are variations in the rewards we can earn. Not all rewards are of equal value.

In many of the Matthew 6 passages Jesus says that the Father "will reward you." But in other places, He speaks about a "great reward." This seems to communicate that there is a difference. Some rewards are greater than others.

The first time we see this is in the Sermon on the Mount in

Matthew chapter 5. It is found in a very interesting context.

*Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>11</sup>Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:11,12)*

Now think through this passage with me a little bit. If someone is beating you (for a sample, go to YouTube and search, “Indian Christians beaten by Hindus”), are you going to ask yourself, “Am I going to be glad and rejoice in this?” If chapter 2 of this book is correct and we are all rewarded evenly (hence no greater rewards), then heck no. There’s no way anyone would want to rejoice in those beatings. They should run and try to get away as fast as they can because there are no benefits except some broken bones or bruised muscles.

But if there is a greater reward as a result of that beating, then—though it may be tough—yes, rejoice. The result would be obtaining greater eternal rewards forever. And they’re not some token rewards that you get at Chucky Cheeses with a handful of tickets to claim a cheap price. No, these rewards far outweigh anything you can go through.

*For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. <sup>18</sup> So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:17,18)*

Note it firmly in your mind. There are “rewards” and then there are “great rewards.” They are not the same. If you fast or pray, you are getting rewards. If you are beaten for the name of Christ, you are going to get a great reward. Both are amazing and wonderful.

## **Misthos**

The actual word “rewards” used in the Matthew 5 passage is the Greek word *misthos*. Misthos is defined as:

- dues paid for work

- wages, hire
- reward: used of the fruit naturally resulting from toils and endeavors
- in both senses, rewards and punishments
- of the rewards which God bestows, or will bestow, upon good deeds and endeavors of punishments<sup>19</sup>

Wow, “dues paid for work”? That sounds like something you earn! This clearly contradicts the second chapter of this book where Jim, Gabriella, Xian, Fatimah, and Dimasuy all got the same reward! But that is exactly what Jesus is trying to communicate. You earn eternal rewards. We find examples of this in other passages in the Bible, which clearly communicate this idea.

To show you the meaning of that same Greek word *misthos*, look at Acts 1 regarding Judas:

*With the payment (*misthos*) he received for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. (Acts 1:18)*

Here *misthos* is translated as “payment” for information he gave. Judas got paid for something he did. This same relationship between works and reward is also found in 1 Timothy:

*For Scripture says, “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,” and “The worker deserves his wages.” 1 Timothy 5:18*

Back then, as well as now, if you did an honest job, you expected to get paid. Money is exchanged for services provided. So it is in God’s kingdom. Though we get to heaven by grace, works done in Jesus’ name earn us rewards.

The beauty of these rewards is that they will never perish, spoil or fade! God wants you to have these eternal rewards forever!

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into*

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G3408&t=KJV>

*a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you.... (1 Peter 1:3,4)*

*Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. (1 Corinthians 9:25)*

*And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. (1 Peter 5:4)*

What a gracious God! Not only does He reward us, but He rewards us in His everlasting, glorious way. And this reward is not a one-to-one ratio. God rewards us in a hundred-fold manner! Let's look at Matthew 19:

*And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. (Matthew 19:29)*

What is the equivalent of "a hundred times as much"?

When I had Hunter and 12 of his friends over for a "Digging Deeper"<sup>20</sup> at our house, I told them all to bring a dime. During this Digging Deeper, I taught them about the principle of rewards that I'm teaching here in this book. When we got to this part about "a hundred fold" I said, "Give me your dimes."

As each of them gave me their dime, I gave them a \$10 bill in return. It was a visual demonstration of how God wants to reward them. For every dime we spend on Jesus' kingdom, God rewards us with \$10. (Now that's grace!)

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<sup>20</sup> Digging Deeper is where kids come to our house on Friday at 5pm. We give them dinner, then spend four hours studying God's Word. They spend the night (guys in one room, girls in the other) and then we feed them breakfast. We then spend three more hours in God's Word. They get pizza for lunch. Then there is an additional three more hours in God's Word. 10 hours in God's Word with no games or activities, just time in God's Word. They love it!

They were then challenged with that \$10 bill. "You can either go and get yourself a lunch, or you can give it to the poor or needy. If you do that, you'll be making \$1,000 for eternity that can never perish, spoil or fade. The choice is yours."

Doing the math shows that this will be the equivalence of 10,000% interest! When you give away a dollar, you are making \$100 eternally that will never perish, spoil or fade. When you give away \$100, you are making \$10,000 eternally which will never perish, spoil or fade.

I was speaking at a church in California many years ago. Before I got up to speak, they took an offering for the needs of the poor. I put in a \$20 bill because I knew it was the best investment I could make with that \$20. I made \$2,000<sup>21</sup> eternally that morning.

But notice one thing about what Jesus said regarding these rewards. We get them after we die!

*But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. (Luke 14:13,14)*

Some of the rewards that God wants to give us come now. But this text also seems to indicate that many of them are to be given to us after we die. The unfortunate thing is that many people are looking for their blessings now, here on earth. Yes, some come now, but those are temporary. The ones we also really want are the ones that come after we die, because they last forever!

## **Justified versus Sanctified**

So let's take a step back and look at the big picture. There is a difference between our names being "recorded in heaven" and us being "rewarded in heaven." Look at the graph at the top of the next page:

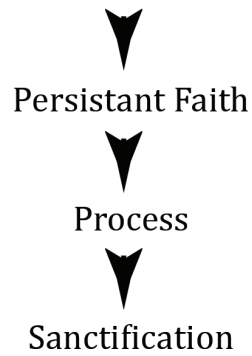
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<sup>21</sup> Ha! As if the currency in heaven is in U.S. dollars!

OUR NAMES BEING  
Recorded In Heaven



US BEING  
Rewarded In Heaven



When our names were recorded in heaven, it was an initial act of faith that made it happen. We trusted God to take away our sins. Maybe we prayed an official prayer with someone or at a church. Maybe we just spoke to God in our heart. In either case, it was our first time trusting Christ to be our Savior.

But to be rewarded in heaven, there needs to be a persistent faith. This initial faith needs to grow deep roots and remain strong and go on throughout our lifetime. It is what makes you a mature believer. The ultimate reward of that persistent faith is getting to sit with Christ on His throne ruling and reigning with Him. This is reserved only for those who are faithful to the end.

Another way of stating this is that our salvation (the moment we are saved) was an event. It was a one-time act of putting our faith in Christ to take away our sins. It was that day we prayed "the prayer."<sup>22</sup>

But being rewarded is a process that comes after *a lifetime of doing works in His name*. We do these works by faith. It is a lifetime process that never stops. That's why we read in 1 Thesalonians:

*We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and*

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<sup>22</sup> This is not necessarily true for many others who grew up in Christian homes. Their parents raised them with a Christian worldview and they have been believers as long as they can remember. Though our four children asked Christ into their hearts at about four years of age, they don't remember it at all nor reference that time as when they gave their lives to the Lord.

*your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 1:3)*

A third way of saying all of this is that our one-time act of initial faith is what theologians call “justification.” I’ve always remembered justification defined as “just as if I’d never sinned.” When we are justified in God’s eyes, God sees us as perfect. That happens the moment we become believers.

But the definition for sanctification is quite different. *Sanctification is the lifetime process of becoming more and more like Christ.* It is growing in our relationship with God through prayer, fasting, fellowship, worship, and good deeds. And we are rewarded for all of these disciplines.

Jesus was very clear that He was going to reward people based on how they lived their lives on the earth. This was referring to a sanctified life:

*For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done. (Matthew 16:27)*

If I’ve communicated to you clearly by this point, you’ll know that Jesus isn’t referencing salvation here. He is referencing rewards. He’ll reward a sanctified life, not just a justified life.

If you’re still not sure this is about rewards, look at the context of the passage. It is so important.

In Matthew 16:21-23, Jesus just told His disciples He is going to have to die. Peter says, “No, Lord.” Then Jesus says, “Get thee behind me, Satan.” Weird, until you understand what Jesus is teaching. Let’s look at the passage:

*From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. <sup>22</sup>Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!” <sup>23</sup> Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling*



*block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.” (Matthew 16:21-23)*

What was Jesus doing? He was addressing Satan directly. He told Satan, “You don’t have in mind what My Father gets to do. You are so focused on the temporal. If I don’t go, My Father would not be able to show off and live out His fullest glory. My purpose and life would be nullified. But I am not going to live for the temporary pleasures of life. I said no back at that temptation in the desert, I am saying no again. I want to glorify My Father and live with an Eternal Perspective. I will pick up my cross and die.”

After demonstrating how He is living with an eternal perspective, He challenges His disciples to do the same:

*Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup>For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. <sup>26</sup>What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? <sup>27</sup>For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done. (Matthew 16:24-27)*

Note in verse 24 that Jesus is talking about being a disciple. This is what Christ has called us to be: disciples. Disciples are those who have embraced the hardship of what it means to walk with God. They know it may mean suffering. They know it may mean persecution, trials and tribulation. But they also know that they will be fully rewarded in eternity. This is why Jesus says, “To be my disciple, you must deny yourselves and take up your cross.” He’s challenging them to be Nike™ Christians every day.

## **Believers versus Disciples**

Please note the difference. There are many people in our churches who are believers, but not disciples. (They are merely “fans” of Jesus as Kyle Idleman says.) They want Christ as their

Savior, but not their Lord. They want justification, but not sanctification. They want their fire insurance, but they don't want hardship and possible martyrdom. In our other terminology, they are the immature descendants not the mature "family." You know people like that; I know people like that.

Now, if they want to avoid the difficult part of being a disciple of Christ, they will "lose their life" and "lose their soul" (verse 25). Does this mean go to hell? If it does, then Jesus is clearly teaching that salvation is based on works.

No, Ephesians 2:8,9 tell us that salvation comes by faith in Jesus alone and is not based on works.

The Greek word for "lose" is *zimioo*. It can be translated as "to affect with damage" or "to do damage to" or "to suffer loss." Jesus is telling us that if we are not one of his disciples (and gladly accept the hardships that come with it), our lives will be damaged. We will suffer loss—the purpose for which we were created won't come about.

Here on earth our lives will not be as full as they could be. Yes, we might have great jobs with lots of money, but we may be purposeless. Our lives are empty on the inside—though few may notice it. That is a great loss.

The eternal purpose for which we were created (to rule and reign with Christ over a kingdom—99.9999...% of what you were created for) will also be greatly damaged. We will lose the kingdom God had planned for us since the beginning of time and we will suffer a great loss.

It is interesting to note that the other disciples who also quoted Jesus saying this chose different words to use. Luke replaces "soul" (*psyche*—the Greek word found in Matthew 16:26) with the word "self" (*heautou*—the Greek word found in Luke 9:25):

*What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? (Luke 9:25)*

He is basically saying, "If you're not a disciple, you've lost the true purpose for which you were created. Your very personhood—the reason you were created—has been lost." How so very, very sad.

Note how Jesus concludes His teaching to His disciples:

*For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done. (Matthew 16:27)*

He concludes by telling them that if they pick up their crosses and follow Him, they will be rewarded for what they have done. They will gain the best-case scenario. They will be mature believers. The whole context is about living for eternal rewards.

In a nutshell, Matthew 16: 21-27 is telling us that if you avoid the hardships of following Jesus, your life, both here on this earth and eternally, will be damaged. You will not be rewarded either here on earth (with a full and meaningful life) or in heaven (with your kingdom). That is why Jesus immediately speaks about coming back and rewarding us according to our deeds.

Jesus was all about rewards. It is the best-case scenario life to which He is calling us. He has never hidden it from us. Jesus openly challenges us to live a life geared toward an eternity rich with rewards.

What is the result of all of this? Mark it down clearly in that biological hard drive between your ears. There is a difference between our names being recorded in heaven and our lives being rewarded in heaven. There is a difference between being a child of God and a friend of God. There is a difference between merely being a Christian and being a disciple of Christ.

One of these sets get rewarded. The other doesn't.

If you don't get them confused, the Christian life makes so much more sense!

If I'm Saved By Grace, Why Bother With Works?

## Chapter 7: Christians Will Be Judged?

There are many Christians today who have “prayed the prayer” and are not really worried about being judged because they know they get to go to heaven. Why? Because they “prayed the prayer.” And, they believe, any judgment in heaven is all about non-believers being sent to hell. Therefore they assume Christians will never be judged.

In the back of their minds they believe that, even if God does judge their lives, Jesus’ blood will cover it all. He is a gracious and forgiving God. Nothing bad could happen. Heaven is an ultimate utopia! Chapter two of this book speaks truth. Why worry about a thing? Therefore, they live life the way they want to live (at least to ease their conscience) and believe God’s grace will rule in the end.

Though most of the last paragraph is true, it is true only for having their names recorded in heaven. It is not true for being rewarded in heaven. These are two totally different judgments and we Christians will be judged.

### Two Judgment Seats

In my multiple decades of being a believer, I had never been taught (nor taken the time to study) that there are two judgment seats in the Bible. Nor did I know that they are very different.

The first is what is called the “Great White Throne.” It is found in the book of Revelation:

*Then I saw a Great White Throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. <sup>12</sup> And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. <sup>13</sup> The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each*

*person was judged according to what they had done.*<sup>14</sup>  
*Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.*  
*The lake of fire is the second death.*<sup>15</sup> *Anyone whose name was not found written in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire.* (Revelation 20:11-15)

This throne is where non-believers are going to stand before the Living God and be judged. I love the fact that God says the “great and small” will be there. This means the little guy who lives in the middle of no-where will be standing right next to kings and presidents who have had the greatest reputations. To God, they’re all the same. He doesn’t differentiate between them. Once we go into the afterlife, we are all reduced to the same level before God.

Note that “what they have done” (verse 12) will be put on display, and it will show that they were not perfect like God. Because they were not perfect, God will not be able to have any kind of a relationship with them. As a result, they will be sent into an eternal separation from God (hell) because of their “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6).

“Hey, wait a second,” you might think. “I thought we weren’t judged by our works, but by faith.”

And the answer is, “You’re right!” But since they didn’t have faith, it is their works that will penalize them to an eternal separation from God.

But believers are not going to be there at the Great White Throne. Remember the words of Jesus:

*Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.* (John 5:24)

The Great White Throne is for non-believers. Because we have put our faith in Christ, we are exempt from coming before the Living God at the Great White Throne.<sup>23</sup> But the non-believers will have had no faith by this time (nor will they ever get

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<sup>23</sup> If you look in many commentaries, great theologians are split on this. Some believe both believers and non-believers go here, others don’t. It is tough to know exactly. I’m siding with those that believe that true believers will not go there.

another chance).<sup>24</sup> They will be judged based on their works and be found wanting.

Though we believers bypass the Great White Throne, we go to another judgment seat, the Judgment Seat of Christ. Paul talks about this to the Corinthians.

*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.  
(2 Corinthians 5:10)*

The word “judgment seat” is the Greek word *bema*. It is a seat Christ sits upon from which He will test the qualities of our lives.

## The Olympics

When Paul was writing about the judgment seat, he was writing to the people in Corinth who were very familiar with the “bema seat” concept. Corinth was where the Isthmian Games were held. Like the Olympics, these were competitive games held on a regular basis. They consisted of races, wrestling, and boxing, along with musical and poetic contests.

There were, of course, winners and losers. The rewards for victory were given out in the center of town on this bema seat. It usually rested on a raised platform (often with steps leading up to it). Here, the leader of the town (or the games) would give out the rewards. The rewards could be anything from garlands to a crown wreath of leaves to trophies. Some were even exempt from taxes.<sup>25</sup>

The Olympic games themselves began in the seventh century before Christ. (The first Olympic games took place in 776 BC in Olympia.) They were held every four years and ran uninterrupted for 12 centuries! Because they were so widely known, Paul would use examples of them for his teaching through his letters:

*Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the*

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<sup>24</sup> Hebrews 9:27

<sup>25</sup> [http://www.pe04.com/olympic/olympia/prizes\\_o.php](http://www.pe04.com/olympic/olympia/prizes_o.php)

*prize. <sup>25</sup> Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. <sup>26</sup> Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. <sup>27</sup> No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)*

Remember, running and boxing were Olympic sports. He is directly referring to the sports found in the Olympics when trying to get them to walk with the Lord. He doesn't want them to be disqualified from the "prize."

Many people (maybe your pastor, your youth pastor, your friends or even your parents) believe the "prize" is getting into heaven. But if that is the case, getting into heaven is based on works and extreme discipline. It is like preparing for the Olympics. That totally goes against Ephesians 2:8,9 that says it is by faith—not as a result of works!

Paul isn't speaking about getting to heaven. The "prize" is attaining the best-case scenario—earning the kingdom God had prepared for us personally! He is speaking about being rewarded in heaven with the inheritance that God prepared before the foundation of the world! Remember, having our names recorded in heaven and being rewarded in heaven are two totally different things. Paul is referring to the latter.

Since being rewarded in heaven does deal with works, perseverance, and finishing well, you'll see Paul use the analogy of games in the Olympics at other times:

*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. <sup>13</sup> Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12-14)*



*Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. <sup>8</sup> For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. (1 Timothy 4:7,8)*

Here Paul is saying, “Not only will you be rewarded here on earth (with a full and meaningful present life), but you’ll be rewarded in heaven as well.” When he is referencing “life to come,” he is speaking about eternal rewards. The “prize” is getting your full inheritance—the best-case scenario—that God wanted for you from the beginning of time.

Even the writer of Hebrews uses the same analogy:

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.... (Hebrews 12:1)*

You and I are in a race. It is not a race for heaven. (For many, that is a one-time event.) You are in a race to get your full inheritance. And when you finish the race, you will stand before the Judge who sits on the bema seat.

## **We Are Stewards**

In this race, Paul says we are called to be servants and stewards:

*This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. (1 Corinthians 4:1,2—ESV)*

What’s the difference between a servant and a steward? Both serve their master. Both work for a wage. But only a steward is put in charge of managing the master’s assets. We are to be both.

The Greek word for steward is *oikonomos*. It is defined as:

- the manager of household or of household affairs

- esp. a steward, manager, superintendent (whether free-born or as was usually the case, a freed-man or a slave) to whom the head of the house or proprietor has entrusted the management of his affairs, the care of receipts and expenditures, and the duty of dealing out the proper portion to every servant and even to the children not yet of age
- the manager of a farm or landed estate, an overseer
- the superintendent of the city's finances, the treasurer of a city (or of treasurers of kings)

By calling us a steward, God is clearly communicating that everything we have is actually His. It is not our own.

## Two Different Parables of the Talents

This idea of our stewardship is seen in the parables of the talents. The one parable is found in Matthew 25:14-28; the other is seen in Luke 19:11-27. Many believers think that this is the same parable told in two different ways. But they are wrong and are missing something key we need to know. Let's look at Matthew's first.

In the very beginning of this parable we read these words:

*For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. <sup>15</sup> And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. (Matthew 25:14, 15a NKJV)*

The New King James Version catches the emphasis correctly by using the words "his own servants." It comes from the use of one key Greek word *idios*. It often implies "the sense of being peculiarly one's own."<sup>26</sup> The idea behind it is that these servants were personal servants. They weren't "John Does" off the street. These were his personal servants whom he could trust. It also makes sense that the man wouldn't give talents to those he doesn't know or trust.

The implication is that these servants (all three) were repre-

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<sup>26</sup> *Final Destiny*, Joseph Dillow, copyright 2012, Page 815

senting believers. This is key in understanding the parable—especially with the third servant, whom we'll look at later.

Note that they received different amounts of talents. These differing talents, I believe, are a combination of spiritual gifts that we all get (Ephesians 4:11). Using them we have general opportunities for service.

Some were given five talents. Their gift set is amazing! These are the Billy Grahams, the Andy Stanleys, and the Beth Moores. These people are used greatly of God. And because they are being used greatly by God, their names are usually very well known today.

Others were given two talents. These could be the Karen Kingsburys, the Henry Blackabys, the Sarah Youngs, the Frank Perettis. They are being used by God, but they are not as well known as the Billy Grahams or the Beth Moores. They are known in some circles, but not in others.

Then there are those who were given one talent. That's the average John Doe like you and me. There's nothing great about us. But, like all the others, we do have gifts given to us by God and God does use us.

The key is, we all differ in the ability (gifts) that God has given us.

Now the one who had five, made five. The one who had two, made two. And the one who had one, made zero.

*Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. <sup>17</sup> And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. (Matthew 25:16,17)*

So what did God say to them?

The one who had five and made five heard the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." The one who had two and made two also heard the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." But the one who had one and didn't invest it, got a verbal lashing. This was all from Matthew's parable.

In Luke's parable, there is a huge difference. Although we only hear about three of the servants, the parable starts off with ten servants, and there are ten minas. Each servant got one

mina—though only three are talked about at the end of the parable. (Because only three are talked about, many think this is the same parable. But remember, it is very different.)

Now be careful, a mina is different from manna—bread that came out of heaven. A mina represents an amount of money, approximately three months' worth of salary.

Therefore He said:

*A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. <sup>13</sup>So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, "Do business till I come." (Luke 19:12,13 NKJV)*

Note that it does not say "his own servants." The Greek word "idios" was not used. These are not his close servants. Here, ten minas were given. Not ten to each, but ten divided among the ten of them. Simple math mandates that each got one. How do we know that? When the servants have to give a report, they say, "Here is your mina"—singular. They each started out with an equal amount.

And note "mina" is used here. Why use a different word? Is this referencing spiritual gifts like the last parable we looked at? I think not because they all got the same amount, and not everyone is gifted the same. Each servant got one mina—approximately three month's salary. This is not something they have on the inside of their souls (like spiritual gifts), but something they have on the outside.

I believe these minas are referring to *opportunities everyone on planet earth is given equally*. This means that the child trapped in slavery in Vietnam working in a sweat factory has the same opportunity with their "mina" as the millionaire in America who is living a very comfortable life. But how are they equal?

They are equal in the fact that:

- Each of them has the same 24 hours in a day. They can use it to advance their own kingdom or God's kingdom.
- Each of them can daily set aside time to meet with God. They can meet with Him on a regular basis or neglect him all together.
- Each of them are motivated in one way or another.

They can be motivated to live for their own glory or for God's glory.

- Each can communicate. They can communicate to those around them to build them up in Christ or to tear them down.
- Each can talk with God throughout the day or totally ignore God.
- Each can serve God whole-heartedly or half-heartedly.
- Each can use a certain percentage of the money they have to advance God's kingdom. (Please note, God isn't impressed with how much we give, it's what percentage we give. This is why the widow's mite impressed Jesus so greatly—it was all she had. She gave 100% to God!)
- Each can give thanks for whatever has been given to them by God—or they can be thankless.
- Each has opportunities every day to honor God or live for themselves.
- Everyone on this planet has the same opportunities to impress God with these talents.

Now note what the one servant heard who had earned ten more minas.

*“Well done, my good servant!” his master replied. “Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.” (Luke 19:17)*

He heard “well done” just like the one who had five and earned five, and the one who had two earned two.

And what God say to the one who had one and earned five?

*“His master answered, ‘You take charge of five cities.’” (Luke 19:19)*

He was given five cities. But what's most important is what is not said. He did not hear the words “well done.” What is implied?

He probably could have done more with the opportunities he had. But he did a fairly good job and is still going to be re-

warded—but he could have earned more rewards. He did not fulfill his full potential. He didn't get the best-case scenario.

Bruce Wilkinson talks about this principle in his book *A Life God Rewards for Teens*. He tells a family story where his son studied hard, yet struggled in math. In the same class was his son's friend who barely studied and got easy A's. He then writes:

Life just didn't seem fair to him. I sat down with him. "David," I asked, "what percentage of your friend's abilities do you think he is really using in class?"

"Not very much," said David, "maybe half."

I asked, "What percentage are you using?"

"Almost all of it?"

Then I asked, "Who gave you your strengths and who gave you your weaknesses?"

"God, I guess," he answered.

"Right," I said. "So He wouldn't expect the same results from one of your weaknesses as He would from one of your strengths, would He?"

David agreed. Then I told him that he should remember that every paper at school gets two grades—one from his teacher and one from God. And God's grades are always based on potential.<sup>27</sup>

The one servant who made five talents had more potential—it was potential he didn't use. Therefore he didn't hear the words "well done."

In Matthew's parable, the servants with five talents and two talents both heard the words "well done." Why? Because they both earned a 100% increase. They used all of their potential. This is why they were told "well done." As a result, they were put in charge of much. But in Luke's parable, the only one who heard the words "well done," was the man who had an increase of

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<sup>27</sup> *A Life God Rewards for Teens*, Bruce Wilkinson with David Kopp, Multnomah Publishers, page 71.

over 1,000%. That's using tremendous potential. He was put in charge of ten cities.

Now remember, these parables are very different, teaching very different things. Look at the graph over on the right to see the differences for you.

Luke 19:11-26

Matthew 25:14-30



Luke's all had equal minas. Mathew's had different talents. Only three of the six heard “well done.” These are key.

What do we learn from these two parables?

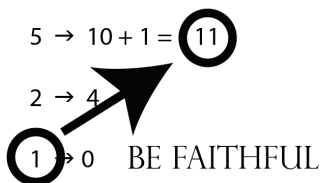
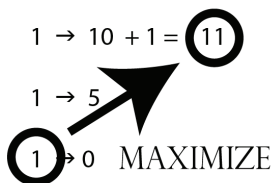
Both parables teach us that God wants us to be faithful with what He has given us. If you have talents, use them faithfully for God. Also be faithful with all the opportunities God has given to everyone on the earth.

But both parables also teach us something else. God wants us to maximize the use of our talents. He is pleased when we maximize our lives for His kingdom.

A third lesson is found in the third servant. In both parables, the one who earned zero had his taken away and given to the one who earned the most. This tells us that God rewards maximization. If you are faithful with what God has given to you and maximize your life, God will greatly reward you.

Luke 19:11-26

Matthew 25:14-30



This means God has given everyone around the globe an

equal opportunity to be faithful with what they've been given—and to maximize their potential impact. And it could be that a young single mom with five kids in Africa (wondering where her next meal is going to come from) could earn just as much rewards as anyone in America. Her faith in God's providing, her kind words to others, her sharing the little she has, her constant praise to God, her simple evangelism and communication with God could earn her just as much in rewards as an Andy Stanley.

*Earning rewards is not dependent upon what you have. It's dependent upon what you do with what you have.*

## God Judges Impartially

No wonder the Scriptures repeatedly say that God judges the world impartially:

*He rules the world in righteousness and judges the peoples with equity. (Psalm 9:8)*

*And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him. (Ephesians 6:9)*

*And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work.... (1 Peter 1:17)*

*Now let the fear of the LORD be on you. Judge carefully, for with the LORD our God there is no injustice or partiality or bribery. (2 Chronicles 19:7)*

From the parables of the talents and minas, it is clear: we are on this planet as stewards of what God has given us and God wants to see how we are going to use our gifts and opportunities to glorify Him. We have been entrusted with God's kingdom, and we will be held accountable. There will be a Judgment Day for all believers. God wants to see how we did with what He gave us.

Paul wanted to be sure the Romans knew about it.

*You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or*



*why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. (Romans 14:10)*

Not only is there a Judgment Day, but Peter tells us that it starts with us!

*For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God. (1 Peter 4:17a—ESV)<sup>28</sup>*

Since there is a Judgment Day, let's ask an innocent question. What will that judgment be based on? What "proof" will God have?

## **God Is Keeping Records**

I used to think that there was only going to be one book in heaven. It was going to be the Book of Life. It was my hope and prayer that my name was written in the book. But my mentor, Don Richardson, taught me there are going to be lots of books in heaven—in fact, an entire library!

Daniel chapter 10 speaks about the "Book of Truth:"

*...but first I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth. (Daniel 10:21a)*

In Psalm 87 we find a "Register of the Peoples." This book is a register keeping track of every people group that has ever existed on the face of the earth. God is doing this because He made a promise to Abraham to reach every one of them and He is keeping track to show that He is faithful in His promise:

*The Lord will write in the register of the peoples: "This one was born in Zion." (Psalm 87:6)*

In Revelation 20:12 we read that the "books" (plural) were opened up. It is different from the Book of Life and they have recorded in them the deeds of those who do not make it into heaven:

*And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book*

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<sup>28</sup> See Hebrews 10:30 as well.

*was opened, which is the Book of Life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. (Revelation 20:12)*

Of the many books, one is given special notice. It is this book that I believe God is going to use to determine whether or not we get rewards. This book is mentioned in Malachi when the Jews were not happy about how evildoers are prospering—even when they put God to the test. Read their complaint:

*You have said, “It is futile to serve God. What do we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the Lord Almighty? <sup>15</sup> But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly evildoers prosper, and even when they put God to the test, they get away with it.” (Malachi 3:14,15)*

God then answers them in a very unique way:

*Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name. (Malachi 3:16)*

May I propose to you that God is keeping tabs of everything in our lives. It is called the Scroll of Remembrance. Though the Scroll of Remembrance is only mentioned in this book, I believe it is referred to in other places when the text says “the books were opened up.” (It would seem difficult to put everything on each and every human in one scroll/book. Therefore I think “the books”—which aren’t explained elsewhere but only referred to—represent that scroll.)

In this scroll (these books) are:

- every word we speak,
- every text we text,
- every tweet we tweet,
- every Instagram we post,
- every e-mail we send,
- every look,

- every action we do in private,
- every word whispered in secrecy.

They are being recorded in the Scroll of Remembrance. We are going to be held accountable.

Let's look at some more passages that point us in this direction. Jesus says every word we have spoken (remember, it's been recorded) will be judged:

*But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned. (Matthew 12:36,37)*

Luke records Jesus saying that nothing will be concealed:

*There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs. (Luke 12:2-4)<sup>29</sup>*

Can you imagine slandering someone privately but then having it broadcast to everyone on Judgment Day? Ouch. But that is what is going to happen if it has not been confessed.

We find this in the Old Testament as well. Solomon (the wisest man in the world) told us that every deed will be held accountable:

*For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil. (Ecclesiastes 12:14)*

Solomon even challenges the young people to live life to the fullest—while all the time remembering there will be accountability on the last day:

*You who are young, be happy while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes*

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<sup>29</sup> See also Romans 2:16 and 1 Samuel 2:3

*see, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. (Ecclesiastes 11:9)*

## **But I Thought We Weren't Condemned?**

If you haven't gotten it yet (and if you haven't I'm doing a very poor job, please forgive me), this judgment has nothing to do with getting into heaven! This judgment has everything to do with finding out how many rewards we will receive—how we will rule and reign in His kingdom forever. Will we get our best-case scenario or a so-so scenario?

The Scriptures are very clear that we will not be judged with regard to getting into heaven.

*Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (John 3:18)*

If we have a relationship with Christ, we are not condemned. This is why Jesus could say confidently:

*Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. (John 5:24)*

Our past, present, and future sins are completely forgiven through the substitutionary death of Jesus. We have nothing to fear. We will not be judged before the Great White Throne. But we will still be judged before the Judgment Seat of Christ. This judgment has everything to do with rewards. (Remember, our names are already recorded in the Book of Life!)

So when you hear someone quote Romans 8:1, "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," know that it is referencng entering the kingdom of God, not inheriting the kingdom of God!

## Chapter 8: What God Is Looking For

So what criteria is God going to use to judge us? How does God determine if we used our gifts and opportunities well? What is He looking for in our stewardship?

### Seven Criteria

From the Scriptures, I believe there are seven criteria or aspects of our lives that will be judged. These are listed below in random order. It is not suggested that God will start with “motivation” first and then work His way down. Only God knows how to take all of these into account in a perfectly balanced way.

- Our Motivation
- Our Faithfulness
- Our Wholehearted Service to God
- Our Deeds
- Our Opportunities
- Our Words
- Our Thoughts

### 1. Our Motivation

Unfortunately, there are many Christians serving the Lord who serve with improper motivations. They are more focused on themselves than God. They have a passion to be seen and recognized by other people. Their goal is to receive their own glory from people and not from God. Without knowing it, they are seeking to advance their own kingdom, not God's kingdom. Luke saw this:

*Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.*  
(Acts 20:30)

What was the motivation of those who distorted the truth?

It was to get others to follow them. They wanted to be the center of attention. They wanted to be what others were talking about. It was all about them.

John writes about the same thing:

*I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will not welcome us. <sup>10</sup> So when I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, spreading malicious nonsense about us. Not satisfied with that, he even refuses to welcome other believers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church. (3 John 9,10)*

Note the end of verse 10. Diotrephes puts them “out of the church,” which means he is “in” the church. Here was a church leader who loved to be first. There can be people like that today as well.

This could be a pastor who seeks God faithfully to be used to start a megachurch, not for God’s sake, but out of a poor self-image. He needs the praise and approval of men, so he combines it with a “godly vision,” but in reality he is only after the praise of people for his own sake. It could be a missionary who wants to plant a church in an unreached people group—doing it, not to please God, but to be seen as a spiritual giant in the eyes of others. It could be a layperson who seeks to be an elder of a church, not to serve God, but to get the kudos of his fellow peers.

Even in the church, our motivation can be so deceptive. But God isn’t deceived. God sees right through it:

*Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. <sup>2</sup> So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. <sup>3</sup> But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Matthew 6:1-4)*

When God sees a proper motivation, then He rewards us. The opposite is completely true as well. If we don't have a proper motivation, our rewards will be the applause of people (which is temporal) and we will not have eternal rewards. (Think of it: being the pastor of a really, really big megachurch, with the wrong motivation, and gaining people's praise and adoration for 40 or so years, but then losing eternal rewards.) Any child could tell you that doing this isn't a good deal.

So what should our motivation be focused on? Paul admonishes us that all we do should be to the glory of God:

*So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)*

This means we are to be motivated to advance God's kingdom, not ours. We are to live to make God famous, not ourselves. We are to seek to honor God, not people. We are to seek to please Him, not others.

He also says we are to do things out of love:

*Do everything in love. (1 Corinthians 16:14)*

The idea of God judging our motivation can be quite freeing. Why? Because our focus is not necessarily "was it right or wrong?" but "what was our motive behind it?"

Let's be honest, with so many different understandings of what the Scriptures mean, some of us must have wrong interpretations. And if those who act on a wrong interpretation act improperly—with good motivations—God is not going to strike them with a blow. Rather He is going to weigh the motivations behind their actions.

We may not have our entire theology right on baptism, or the role of women in the church, or the LGBT issues, or politics, or "going green," or abortion, but God's OK with that. He will be scrutinizing our motivations behind what we did on this earth.

## **#2: Faithfulness**

Along with our motivation, God also looks at our faithfulness:

*Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful. (1 Corinthians 4:2 NKJV)*

*Do not fear any of those things, which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Revelation 2:10 NKJV)*

Some of our hard times are a test. God is going to test us to see if we are going to be faithful. Why? If God can trust us with things here on earth, then He can trust us with things in eternity:

*His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' (Matthew 25:23)*

Many years ago I needed to raise money for an office and video studio to be built upon my property that would allow the ministry to grow and allow me to put my teaching in digital form. I asked God to raise up thirteen people who would believe in the message and who would back me financially with an annual gift at the end of each year for ten years. In return, I told them that I would pray for them three days a week.

God raised them up. The office/studio was built. And I did pray. But I was amazed how difficult it was to remember each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday to pray. Not only did I have to remember to pray, but it took time to pray for them. And I found it was taking up more and more of my own prayer time than I wanted. Did I really need to keep praying for them? They'd never know either way.

In year four I found a huge challenge in front of me. Three of them quit giving. So I asked myself, "Should I keep praying for those three? They're not being faithful to me, why should I be faithful to them?" My answer was found in the fact that I had made a commitment to God—and I wanted to be found faithful. So I kept on praying even though they didn't fulfill their promise.

The hardest struggle came in the tenth year. This was due to the fact that as they gave at the end of the year, I was to pray the



entire next year for them knowing they were not going to give again at the end of that year. In the tenth year they were done—yet I still had made a commitment to pray for them the following year.

That year Satan kept whispering, “Give it up. You’ve done good enough.” But I didn’t simply want to be good enough, I wanted to finish strong in faithfulness. By God’s grace, I made a commitment in my heart to keep praying till the end of that final year.

I did this because I knew I wanted to be found faithful. I wanted to gain my full inheritance. I wanted the best-case scenario. I wanted to be mature. I wanted God to be able to give me the full kingdom He had prepared for me in Eternity Past. I knew the “struggle” that I experienced would yield “much:”

*Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much... (Luke 16:10a)*

I fully believe that if I had given up that tenth year, I would not receive as “much” in rewards in heaven as if I had prayed all ten. God wouldn’t be able to trust me as much, hence my reward would have been less.

I don’t know about you, but that motivates me. I want to be found trustworthy and faithful. I want the best-case scenario that will also give God the greatest opportunity to show off and put on display His grace.

### **#3: Whole Hearted Service**

Not only does God want us to be faithful, but He wants us to serve Him wholeheartedly:

*Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, <sup>8</sup> because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free. (Ephesians 6:7,8)*

He gave the Israelites these orders:

*You must serve faithfully and wholeheartedly in the fear of the LORD. (2 Chronicles 19:9)*

Wholehearted service is the basis God used as to whether the Israelites got to enter the Promised Land or not. (Remember, the Promised Land is analogous to being rewarded in heaven.)

Look at what God says about those over the age of 20, and what He says about Caleb:

*Because they have not followed me wholeheartedly, not one of those who were twenty years old or more when they came up out of Egypt will see the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—not one except Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua son of Nun, for they followed the LORD wholeheartedly.*  
(Numbers 23:11,12)

God wants us following Him wholeheartedly. If we do, He will richly reward us.

So what would it mean to not follow God wholeheartedly? You probably already know yourself.

- For some men it would mean knowing that there's a men's retreat, knowing they should go to it, but not going because they were too "busy." Yet they still go to church every Sunday and attend Sunday school.
- For some women it might mean not getting involved in a Bible study or MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) because they don't feel "comfortable" being involved. Again, they attend church every Sunday, they participate in certain church functions, but they never really went after God with all their heart.
- For others it may mean skimping on quiet times or not being in God's Word because they couldn't fit it into their daily schedule. (That's a simple way of saying it wasn't really a priority for them.)

All of these are simple examples of not wholeheartedly serving God. God wants us serving Him (which also means loving Him) with all our heart. In fact, it is the greatest command:

*"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." (Mark 12:28, 30)*

#### #4: Our Deeds

As would be expected, God is also going to judge everything we do:

*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*  
(2 Corinthians 5:10)

This idea of being judged on the things “done” has caused many a sincere seeker of God to believe that they get to heaven through works. But as we have talked about multiple times, this has nothing to do with salvation, but it has everything to do with rewards. This is why the Scripture (in both the Old and New Testaments) can repeatedly talk about works and not contradict itself:

*Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.* (Revelation 22:12)

*For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.* (Matthew 16:27)

*God “will repay each person according to what they have done.”* (Romans 2:6)

*...and with you, Lord, is unfailing love; and, You reward everyone according to what they have done.* (Psalm 62:12)

*Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward them for what they have done.* (Prov. 19:17)

*Tell the righteous it will be well with them, for they will enjoy the fruit of their deeds.* (Isaiah 3:10)

Make no mistake about it. God is recording every deed you do—whether good or bad. And like a baby, lying naked on a changing table waiting to be changed, so shall all of our works be laid bare before the Living God waiting to be judged.

## 5. Our Opportunities

Gerald Robison has always been a wonderful, positive influence in my life. And somehow, he always comes up with the best analogies. One of them really helped me understand what it means to be judged on our opportunities. He told me this analogy:

*I think of life like being in a playground with a fence all around it. The fence represents boundaries we cannot cross. Inside the fence are lots of swings and seesaws and various fun things for us to do. God says to us, "Go inside the playground and have all the fun you want. You can do whatever you want. And always stay inside the fence. But, if you hear me calling your name, stop everything and come running to me immediately, OK? I've got something I want you to do."*

This freed me up to realize that we have freedom to choose how to live this life and freedom to figure out how we want to serve Him (while always keeping a listening ear for when He intervenes and has a specific thing to do or specific place to be). This is a part of what I believe Jesus is getting at with the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:

*For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. <sup>15</sup> And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. (Matthew 25:14,15)*

Why do you think the man "immediately went on a journey"? I think it was to communicate that the man had given talents to his servants and he wanted to see how they were going to use them without him giving directions. They had an opportunity to impress the master.

We today have opportunities to impress our Master in how

we serve our Lord. Sometimes He calls our names and we are to come running because He has something specific for us to do. At other times, He says, "I've given you lots of talent. I want to see how you are serving me with those talents, the choice is yours. What are you going to do for My kingdom?"

My life is made up primarily with the second option in the above paragraph. Rarely have I heard God "speak to me" about a specific task. There have only been two times when I feel like God has done this. The first was when I was a senior in college and He directed me to go to Libya. The second was when, during a prayer time, I felt Him say, "Go after homeschoolers." Other than those two times, my life has largely been a walk of faith. (I never even heard Him speak directly to me about marrying Debby. It was a step of faith—and a great one at that!)

Just about everything else I've done in serving Him (in writing books, in creating DVDs, giving seminars, working in the digital world) has been a step of faith. It was basically me thinking, "You know what, I think this could really be used by God. I think I'll do it and see what happens."

I see this in Jonathan's life. In 1 Samuel 14, Jonathan leaves camp and goes to where the enemies are. Note what he says to his sidekick:

*Then Jonathan said to the young man who bore his armor, "Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the Lord will work for us. For nothing restrains the Lord from saving by many or by few." (1 Samuel 14:6)*

Did you read those words "it may be"? This doesn't sound like Jonathan had heard from the Lord, nor does the text give you any hint of this. It reads more like Jonathan is doing this on his own—having fun in the playground without God having called him. Jonathan wants to see if and how God will bless it. He saw an opportunity and took a step of faith.

But Jonathan even takes it one step further:

*Then Jonathan said, "Very well, let us cross over to these men, and we will show ourselves to them. <sup>9</sup> If they say thus to us, 'Wait until we come to you,' then we will*

*stand still in our place and not go up to them. <sup>10</sup> But if they say thus, 'Come up to us,' then we will go up. For the Lord has delivered them into our hand, and this will be a sign to us." (1 Samuel 14:8-10)*

Now even a novice could tell you that giving the enemy the high ground is a recipe for failure. Jonathan and his armor bearer were going to have to trudge up hill. When they got to the top they would be sucking wind. And who knows if the Philistines would keep their word? Maybe they'd start shooting arrows down on them with gravity on the Philistine side. You don't go up hill to fight a battle. But that's what Jonathan asked from the Lord.

Sometimes stepping out and doing the harder thing brings great pleasure to God. He hasn't spoken it. He hasn't ordained it. But He watches us doing our best and trying hard things to advance His kingdom and He is greatly pleased. And sometimes when we ask for the hardest things (going uphill), God shows up.

If you're in the playground, make opportunities happen. You've been given talents. Use them for His glory and see what He does. Like the servants in the parable who used their talents wisely, may you hear on Judgment Day, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

## 6. Our Words

Just as all of our deeds are being recorded, so are our words:

*But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. <sup>37</sup> For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned." (Matthew 12:36,37)*

The word "empty" in the Greek can be translated as "careless." The Greek defines it as:

- free from labor, at leisure
- lazy, shunning the labor which one ought to perform

Careless words mean those times that "sh\*t" or "da\*n it" or "Jesus Christ" come out of your mouth without thinking. God is

taking note of each one of those. It could also be those outbursts to your parents or to your spouse of “I hate you” or “You p\*ss me off so much” or “I wish you’d just die.”

But it is not merely public words only. Our private words will be judged as well:

*There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. <sup>3</sup> What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs. (Luke 12:2,3)*

This obviously applies to being with your best friend alone at night and gossiping about other people. It applies to a negative whisper at a dinner table to your spouse when you thought no one else heard. It also applies to that “private phone call” where you said things about “that jerk” that you never would have said to that individual in person. With God, there are no “private” conversations.

But I believe it also applies to our non-verbal words, which we so freely and carelessly put on Facebook, texts, tweets and all other forms of social media. Each of those words will be scrutinized before the living God as to whether they obeyed the Scriptures or disobeyed His will.

## **7. Our Thoughts**

A final challenge that stands before us is to know that our thoughts are going to be judged:

*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. <sup>13</sup> And 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. (Hebrews 4:12,13 NKJV)*

The idea that our thoughts are going to be judged really stinks. “Why be judged when it is only thoughts? How can our thoughts hurt anyone? Others don’t even know about it,” we

think to ourselves. But in thinking this way, we have forgotten the main idea of Romans 11:36: everything revolves around God, not people. Just because people aren't hurt doesn't mean God isn't hurt.

- Sure you looked lustfully at that person—but nothing happened. You controlled yourself outwardly. But God knew what went on inwardly—there was no fight against it, and it was more important to you than Him.
- Sure you withheld your anger after your friend said those cruel things to you. You were hurt—it was all about you. You thought about striking out but you withheld your anger. And your friend wasn't even aware of it—but God knew of your self-centeredness.
- Sure you were hoping your fellow employee would fail because you were jealous of them, but you never uttered a word of failure. But God knew your heart. He was sad you didn't live to bless others like He does.
- Sure you weren't excited about the other church down the road growing in attendance because you knew it looked badly on your church—yet you never uttered a word. But God knew you were more worried about your kingdom than His kingdom.

No outward actions were seen in any of these. We looked totally “whole” and “pure” on the outside, but God knows our secret thoughts. And all of them communicated non-verbally that He isn't the treasure of your life.

Are there secrets in your heart? Yes, but they'll be judged:

*This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares. (Romans 2:16)*

Knowing that even our secret thoughts are going to be judged makes us want to scream at God, “God, give us a break. We're only human. Do you want us to be perfect or what?”

The answer is a resounding yes. God does want us to strive for perfection—even in our thoughts:



*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:48)*

*We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5)*

*Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. (Philippians 4:8)*

## **Bathing**

If you are feeling overwhelmed and completely guilty at this point knowing what you have done will be judged, let me give you some encouraging words. God knows all of this and has given you a way out. It is found in two passages.

The first is found in 1 John:

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)*

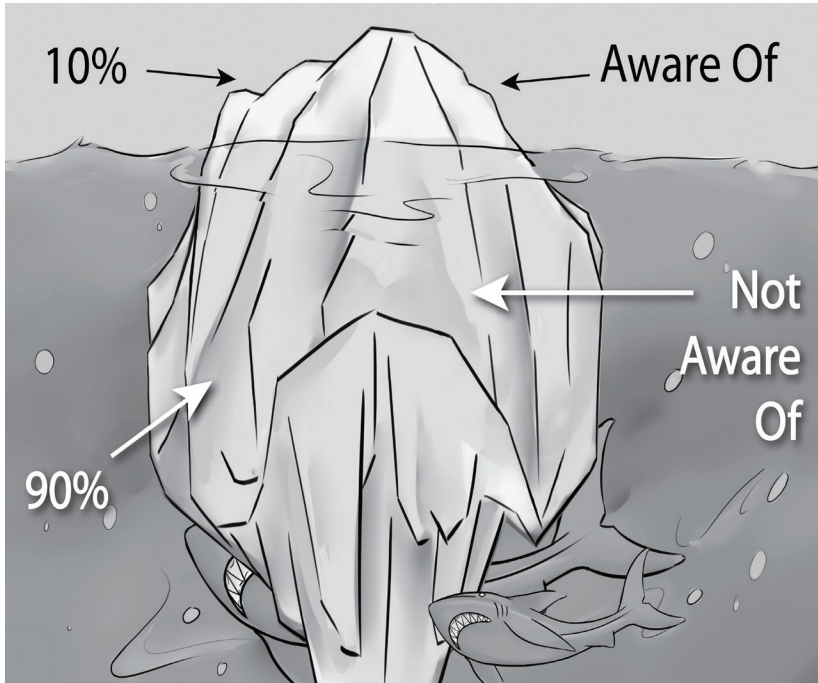
I used to always think that this only applied to when I initially became a believer. If I confessed my sin, it would be forgiven. I would have a relationship with Christ. Though this is true, there is much more to it.

There are two kinds of forgiveness. This first is the eternal forgiveness. It is having our names recorded in heaven. But the second deals with keeping our fellowship with God sweet and clean. (For homeschoolers, this applies to “Spiritual Breathing” that you were taught in Year 1 of Cat and Dog Theology.) It speaks of daily confessing our sins so that God does not “hide His face” from us.

1 John 1:9 can also be applied this way on a daily basis. But when we do it on a daily basis, we are not constantly asking for

forgiveness for all of our sins in the past. Those were already forgiven. We're asking for forgiveness for what we have done since the last time confessed (applying 1 John 1:9).

And what is so amazing is that not only is the sin forgiven that we have specifically talked to God about, but He also purifies us from "all unrighteousness." This means all the sins we weren't even aware that we have done. I never completely understood this until I was taught the iceberg theory.



This theory is very simple. Like an iceberg that is 90% underwater, 90% of our sin is below our consciousness and we aren't even aware of it. We are not held accountable for it. God does, however, keep us accountable for the 10% above the water. That is what we are confessing when 1 John 1:9 says, "When we confess our sins..."

When the verse goes on to say, "And to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," it is speaking of the 90% we are not aware of. All of the sins we have been doing that God has not held us accountable for are completely forgiven. Both what we are aware

of and not aware of has been separated from us as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12).

At that point in time, we are completely clean! Everything that we knew about and didn't know about is forgiven! We can wake up everyday as if we've never sinned.

Let me give you a practical scenario of how this works.

Let's say you became a believer on the morning of May 1st when you were 19 years of age in college. At that point, Jesus forgave all your sins—past, present, and future. This is why Paul says in a past tense, we are “seated” with Christ in the heavenly realms. In God's eyes (positionally), you are seated with Christ.

But even though all your sins are forgiven eternally, you can still damage your fellowship with God by sinning after you become a believer. (Homeschoolers, you would call this moving to Circle #3.) When you do this, you don't lose your salvation, but you lose your fellowship with God. Positionally you're fine, but experientially, you have broken fellowship with God and the Lord hides His face from you.

Now let's say the next day you do things that would make mature Christians cringe! But to you, a new believer, you didn't know any better. The Holy Spirit hasn't convicted you of it yet. Because you haven't been convicted, your fellowship with God is healthy and God hasn't hidden His face from you.

But, let's say on May 5th, your anger got the best of you and you yelled and cursed at your roommate. The Holy Spirit did convict you of that and you knew it was wrong. At that point, your fellowship with God was broken. Positionally, you're still saved, but experientially, your fellowship with God is broken. (He's not on “speaking terms” with you.) What should you do?

You go back to 1 John 1:9 and confess your sins. But you don't confess all of the sins that you had done in the first 19 years—those were all forgiven on May 1st. All you are asking for forgiveness for is for yelling and cursing at your roommate. When you do that, God forgives that sin. You're back on speaking terms with God! But He also cleanses you from the sins you did that you weren't even aware of—the things done that would have made mature believers cringe (the part of that iceberg underneath the water)!

Once you apply 1 John 1:9 at that time, you are completely

clean. If you continue to practice the use of 1 John 1:9 (which my wife and I do regularly), your fellowship with God will stay strong. And you only have to be out of fellowship with God for seconds, not days or months or years as some Christians are.

This is why Jesus said these strange words to Peter when He was about to wash their feet:

*Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean." (John 13:10a)*

If you have "bathed" (confessed your sins and become a believer), then you don't need to confess those sins again (have an entire bath again). But you do need to confess your present sins on a regular basis (have your feet washed).

If you practice having your feet washing on a regular basis (Homeschoolers, again we call this "Spiritual Breathing"), it is very possible to stand before the living God and have no negative judgments at the bema seat because you've kept confessing your sins!

Now that's good news!

## **Accountability Is A Wonderful Thing**

Now let's give you two scenarios on the life we just talked about.

Let's say for whatever reason, during your 21st year, you forget to practice 1 John 1:9. 50 years go by and you die. Guess what happens on Judgment Day? You get to heaven (you don't go before the Great White Throne), but all of those sins that went unconfessed are judged at the bema seat. You lose a lot through that judgment.

But let's say, you live basically the same life for the same 50 years, but keep applying 1 John 1:9 daily. What happens on Judgment Day? You stand before Christ and there is nothing to judge. It has all been forgiven through the practice of confessing your sins.

If you are not practicing 1 John 1:9 on a regular basis, you will stand before God with a track record of a broken fellowship with your Father. And that will affect your rewards. I highly

encourage you to start practicing it.

We Christians will be judged on very specific things. God is going to examine our motivations, our faithfulness, our whole-hearted service to Him, our deeds, our words, our thoughts, and every opportunity we took to make Him famous.

Louis V. Gerstner, Jr. was the chairman of IBM from 1993 to 2002. He wrote a book titled *Who Says Elephants Can't Dance?* In it, he said, "People do what you inspect, not what you expect." This simply means accountability is a very healthy thing. If we know we are going to be held accountable, we are much more likely to do what we are supposed to do.

We need to keep this in mind with our lives. If we know that every word spoken, every text sent, every photo posted, every thought and every motivation is going to be scrutinized on Judgment Day, we are much more likely to live according to the Scriptures rather than the ways of the world.

If I'm Saved By Grace, Why Bother With Works?

## Chapter 9: How Big Is Your Mansion?

Growing up in the church I remember hearing something about rewards, but it was very nebulous. When I used to try to wrap my mind around the rewards God was going to give to me, I had such a limited understanding of what God's Word said, that all I could think about was, "How big is my mansion going to be?"

Later in college it was confirmed that I would have a mansion by one of the verses in the song "I Can't Wait:"

*I can't wait to see Heaven  
And to walk those streets of gold  
I can't wait to check into my mansion  
And get my sleeping bag unrolled.  
Tell me how it's gonna be'  
Read it from the Bible again  
I can't wait to see Jesus  
'Cause Jesus is coming again.*

"Okay," I thought, "so I'm going to get some kind of a mansion, but I will be sleeping in my sleeping bag." (Back in those days I was very happy to derive my theology from popular songs—a very dangerous thing to do!)

So, is there anything biblical about having a mansion? Yes, it comes from Jesus Himself:

*In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. (John 14:2,3 NKJV)*

Early in my Christian life I basically thought that I just needed to be a good person doing some good deeds, and I would be rewarded with a mansion of some sort. How big was it going to be? Well, I wasn't really sure, but I figured I could trust Jesus to

make it any way He desired since He was a gracious God. (The sleeping bag part never really worried me.)

Having a big “mansion/house” is such a small part of the rewards that we will get. Yet most of us are focused on this aspect of it because we constantly ask, “What’s in it for us?”<sup>30</sup>

But if we read the passage in more detail, we’ll find there’s more to it than just a mansion. Let’s look at the three Greek words for house, mansions and place.

The text starts off by saying, “In My Father’s house...” The Greek word for house is *oikia*. It is defined as:

- a house
- an inhabited edifice, a dwelling
- the inmates of a house, the family
- property, wealth, goods

If you think of it as a “dwelling,” the question then becomes, “Where does God dwell?” The answer is everywhere! God is everywhere throughout the universe at the same time.

So it can be accurate to quote Jesus as having said, “*Throughout the universe where My Father dwells, there are many mansions...*”

In the Greek text, the word mansion is *monē*. *Monē* is defined as:

- a staying, abiding, dwelling, abode
- to make an (one’s) abode
- metaphor: of the God the Holy Spirit indwelling believers

To complete our translation of what Jesus is saying, we can now read, “*Throughout the universe where My Father dwells, there are many places where you can stay or dwell...*”

Then Jesus switches from “mansions” to the word “place” found at the end of verse 2 and 3. He’s going to prepare a “place” for us. Place, in the Greek, is *topos*. It is defined as:

- place, any portion or space marked off, as it were from surrounding space
- an inhabited place, as a city, village, district

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<sup>30</sup> Please read *Cat and Dog Theology* to see why we read the Scriptures in a self-centered way. It is an eye opener.



- a place (passage) in a book
- metaphor:
- the condition or station held by one in any company or assembly
- opportunity, power, occasion for acting

An inhabited place could be like a house that we typically live in—this is obvious. But it could be a city or a district as well. It is not necessarily just a house for us.

The definition says it could also be used metaphorically. It could also mean a position held by someone in a company or an assembly. This could mean a position of authority, power—possibly in a government.

What Christ could be saying is this:

*“Throughout the universe where My Father dwells, there are many places where you can stay and I am going to prepare a position of authority for you in my Father’s government somewhere in this universe.”*

Does the Scripture give any indication that we will be in positions of authority in heaven? The answer is yes.

In Revelation 5:10, we read:

*You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth. (Revelation 5:10)*

The words “kingdom,” “serve” and “reign” are pregnant with the idea of having positions of authority. And the idea of “serving” God means that we will somehow have work to do. Heaven is not going to be a 24-hour worship service as some songs imply. (Remember, songwriters are not necessarily great theologians.)

We’ve also seen other references to this in Revelation:

*To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. (Revelation 3:21)*

What do people do from a throne? They rule and reign. And Christ is saying that if we are victorious (Nike™ Christians), we will rule with Him on this throne.

Maybe it is clearer now as you see again how Revelation 2 tells us what we'll be ruling and reigning over:

*To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations. (Revelation 2:26)*

So, if we are victorious (Nike™ Christians) and do God's will to the end (works oriented—inheriting, not entering), we will have authority over nations.

Now I don't know about you, but that blows me away. It also gets me extremely excited and puts a new definition into the word "hope" when Paul says "the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel."<sup>31</sup>

Paul speaks about similar things to the Corinthians:

*Or do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? 3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! (1 Corinthians 6:2,3)*

In the context, Paul seems to be making a statement, which could read, "Duh, you're suppose to know this. This is the ABC's of Christianity. You are going to judge the world and angels." If you are like the Corinthians and you've missed some of the basics (as a majority of Christians have), let's repeat what we are supposed to know.

We are going to rule over the angels and the earth.

Hello? Hello? Did that blow you away? This is not some sci-fi made up movie. This is God's Word. We are to rule over angels and the earth. We really do have hope—a great hope! What a plan God gets to live out and put on display. No wonder Jesus said:

*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. (Matthew 5:4)*

Did Jesus really mean the entire earth? Combined with the other Scriptures, are we going to be ruling over a planet—like

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<sup>31</sup> Colossians 1:5

Paul said, "We are to rule—over the earth"? If we see that Christ is saying, "I am going to prepare a position of authority for you in my Father's government where He dwells—throughout the universe," then yes, we could be ruling over a planet. Why? Because God's house (where He dwells—the Universe) is limitless.

Remember, Jesus was always giving a best-case scenario. When He is talking about mansions and places, He is talking about people inheriting their full kingdom that God planned for them before the beginning of time. And that is completely works oriented.

Yet "ruling over nations" means hierarchy. To some people, that just doesn't seem fair or biblical.

But if you don't know, hierarchy already exists in the way things are right now!

- Jesus is under the Father (John 5:19, 17:5)
- God wants men under Christ and a women under her husband (1 Corinthians 11:3)
- Michael seems to be inferior to Satan (Jude 1:9)
- There are battles in heaven (Revelation 12:7)
- There was an evil prince in Persia, who kept an angel from answering Daniel's prayer. He was later aided by Michael, who seems to be more powerful than that prince. (Daniel 10:10-14)

Now here's a simple question. Do you think this idea of hierarchy is going to stop once the new heavens and the new earth are created? Is God going to say, "Well, that worked well for a while, but let's all be equal now." I don't think so.

Since God is the same yesterday, today and forever (Malachi 3:6, Hebrews 13:8), He's probably going to have this same concept of hierarchy throughout eternity. (Don't forget, we are going to judge angels—1 Corinthians 6:2—and rule over nations—Revelation 2:26. That mandates hierarchy.)

Fix this somewhere in that gray matter between your eyes and the back of your head. Somehow, someday, you will be put into the government of God. How will He determine where He wants you to serve Him?<sup>32</sup> He will determine that position based

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<sup>32</sup> Remember, we will serve Him and reign with Him as seen in Revelation 5:10.

on how faithful you were here on this earth with what He gave you:

*His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' (Matthew 25:21)*

*Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. <sup>11</sup> So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? <sup>12</sup> And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? (Luke 16:10-12)*

Not all of us will be rewarded the same. We will not all have the same responsibilities. God is not a communist. Chapter 2 was wrong.

For me, knowing that there will be differences between us in eternity makes certain passages come alive! In Matthew 5, Jesus speaks about people being least and great in the kingdom:

*Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:19)*

Quite honestly if you had asked me what that meant a decade ago, I would have tried to make something up—trying to sound spiritual of course! I would have guessed that the kingdom of heaven had something to do with the church here on earth. And there would be the great (like the Andy Stanleys) and the least (everyday people who attended church but were unknown to the rest of the world).

But now that I know there will be differences in heaven, the passage makes total sense. There will be great people in heaven (like the Apostle Pauls) and there will be the least in the kingdom of heaven (those who were immature in the church, who knew the Lord but were powerless to live a disciplined, Christian life.)

Note that in this very passage of Matthew 5:19, there are those who are mishandling God's Word and teaching others to do the same. Could this be pastors? Whoever they are, they will be called "least." They still make it to heaven—they trusted Christ for their sins—but they have little to no reward. They wasted their lives and the lives of others.

The second half of the passage is clear. Those who follow God's Word and teach others to do God's Word will be great in the kingdom of heaven. They will be richly rewarded.

When I spoke on this in Mt. Washington, PA, a young man came to me relieved. He said, "I'm so glad you taught this. Because there is a man in our church who is sleeping around, and I've been frustrated. Because if he gets the same rewards as me, that just doesn't seem fair. Now I know he won't."

## **The New You!**

Along with a hierarchical order, we are going to have differing bodies as well. Paul knew the Corinthians were wondering about this. This is why he wrote these words:

*But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" (1 Corinthians 15:35)*

Paul began to answer them in the rest of the chapter. He makes a couple of main points in talking about the differences in our resurrected bodies.

He begins by explaining that in order to be given our new resurrected bodies, we first have to physically die. Just like a seed has to be put into the ground to become a plant, so must we physically die in order to get our new resurrected bodies. (I doubt this was anything new to them.)

*How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. (1 Corinthians 15:36)*

So how different is our earthly body going to be from our new resurrected body?

Paul makes an analogy about the differences between a seed and the plant itself. The seed (which represents our natural bod-

ies here on this earth) is boring in comparison to the plant (our future bodies), which will be glorious.

Differences on earth are also reflected in how different our human flesh is to animals, birds, and fish:

*Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. (1 Corinthians 15:39)*

Paul points out that just as our earthly bodies have differences, so too will our resurrected bodies have differences. Those variations will be seen in the differences between a star, the moon and the sun:

*There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. <sup>41</sup> The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor. (1 Corinthians 15:40,41)*

The difference between our earthly bodies and our heavenly bodies is enormous. But even our heavenly bodies will have differences. Let's look at this passage in its entirety:

*How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. <sup>37</sup> When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. <sup>38</sup> But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. <sup>39</sup> Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. <sup>40</sup> There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. <sup>41</sup> The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.*

*<sup>42</sup> So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. (1 Corinthians 15:36-42)*

In the next verses, Paul talks even more about the differences between our earthly bodies and our resurrected bodies:

*The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; <sup>43</sup> it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; <sup>44</sup> it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. (1 Corinthians 15:42-44)*

Paul is saying, “Our earthly body is temporal, weak and imperfect. Our resurrected body will be eternal, perfect and powerful!”

If you're under 30 years of age, you probably don't get excited about this. Your body is young and strong. But if you're getting older like me and have aches and pains in your body, this verse is thrilling. Our new bodies will be eternal. There won't be any aches or pains. There won't be any cancer or any form of disease. Our bodies will be perfectly healthy—forever! (Now that gets me excited!)

As Paul was exchanging letters with the Corinthians, some more questions came up about these differences. So Paul made a second analogy between our bodies here on earth and our new resurrected bodies. Instead of the seed and the plant, he compared a tent to a building in his second letter to the Corinthians:

*For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. (2 Corinthians 5:1)*

How easy is it for a tent to get blown over or destroyed? It is very easy. How easy is it for a building to be blown over or destroyed? It is very difficult. He is communicating that whatever “glories” our bodies now have, our resurrected bodies will be so much greater!

## **Sun, Moon and Stars**

But many people can miss the whole point of these passages. It is not only in the fact that our resurrected bodies will be

greater, but they'll be different from each other.

Why do we miss it? We miss it because of a paragraph break. Notice the paragraph return between verses 41 and 42 in 1 Corinthians 15. It communicates that a whole new thought is beginning. This was the work of—you guessed it—the modern-day translator, not necessarily Paul. Because it indicates that there is a completely different thought between the two verses, most people don't connect verses 40 and 41 together. But they are to be together. It is a complete thought.

Do you realize what this means?

It means that when we get to heaven and are in our new resurrected bodies, some of us are going to shine like the sun. Some of us are going to shine like the moon. Some of us are going to shine like stars. We will not all be the same. (Though now we know that some stars are bigger than our sun and shine brighter, back in Paul's day, they did not know that. Shining like a star meant very light "brightness.")

Why will we be different? Our glory will be based on how God rewards us for the lives we lived here on this earth. Remember, God is not a communist. We will not all be equal.

Those who will have been faithful to the end (Nike™ Christians) will shine like the sun! Those who did well, but could have done better, will shine like the moon. Those who wasted their lives away will shine like the stars. They'll be shining, but not as brightly—and even they will differ.

Is there any other Scripture that backs up this idea that we'll be shining like the sun? Yes, if you realize that when God speaks about our future bodies, He is always giving us that "best-case scenario." (Why cast a vision for anything less?)

We see this in Jesus' words when He spoke about Judgment Day:

*The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. <sup>42</sup> They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>43</sup> Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. (Matthew 13:41-43)*



And remember, John tells us that our new resurrected body will be like Jesus:

*Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him... (1 John 3:2)*

How was Jesus?

*And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. (Matthew 17:2)*

God didn't surprise us with this idea in the New Testament. It was actually an Old Testament idea:

*Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: <sup>6</sup> He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun. (Psalm 37:5,6)*

Can we go online and request what our future resurrected bodies will be like—like ordering a pizza? Paul says no. We simply have to die, then our body will be determined by God. We can't request anything specific. We don't get to ask God for what we want. He makes it clear: God is under no obligation to honor anyone's request or desires. He'll give us exactly what He wants. It will be based on the quality of life we live on this earth.

As you read this book, realize one thing: You were created to be a glorious, huge<sup>33</sup> supernatural being. And you were designed to shine like the sun—radiating the glory of your Father. God wants you to have this glorious body. He wants you to shine like the sun. But it's up to you. It will be determined by how you live your life on this earth. And whatever you get will last forever.

With differing bodies and differing roles of authority, it is clear that some of us are going to be richly rewarded, and some will be poorly rewarded.

Peter didn't want his readers to be poorly rewarded. He

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<sup>33</sup> A building is much bigger than a tent—even though Jesus' resurrected body was not supernaturally large.

wanted the best-case scenario for them.

## Rich Welcome

Instead of speaking about an inheritance, Peter calls it the “rich welcome” and directly attaches it to works:

*His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. <sup>4</sup> Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. <sup>5</sup> For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; <sup>6</sup> and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; <sup>7</sup> and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. <sup>8</sup> For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, <sup>11</sup> and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:3-11)*

Let's break the text down in bite-size pieces.

First, Peter is talking about having a godly life in verse 3. What constitutes a godly life? It is a mature life. A life that is full of living for the glory of the Father. A life that is lived passionately for advancing His kingdom and not our own. A life without consistent, habitual sin. A life that quickly repents and puts Christ back on the throne. A life that lives out humility and justice. And this life is not stagnant. True passionate believers will have this life in increasing measure (verse 8).

But notice the rest of verse 8. Not everyone is going to be increasing in this godly life. Though they have everything they

need for this kind of existence, they can lead ineffective and unproductive lives. What does that life look like?

It means somewhere along the line they fizzled out. They took Christ as their Savior and Lord, but lost His Lordship somewhere in the process. They started on the road to maturity, but somehow got sidetracked. They did not hear His voice. They were living for themselves in a Christian context. They wanted a safe, soft, easy, comfortable life. They never sought to deal with the pride in their lives. They never sought to do justice. They looked down upon the poor and the afflicted and never lifted a finger to help them. Their lives were all about themselves.

Now don't be confused, they may have gone to church every Sunday, but their lives weren't about the King's agenda. They led a self-centered life in fellowship with others who called themselves believers. Yet Peter says they are believers because they have been "cleansed from their past sins."

Peter is telling us that there could be two different types of lives lived here on the earth. Note how Peter concludes his opening to the churches in verse ten.

"If you do these things..." Hopefully by now you are *not* thinking, "Uh oh. Here we are again. It is works oriented. I'm still confused." My prayer is that by now you are realizing, "Yes, that's right, it is works oriented because he is talking about being rewarded, not having their names recorded."

So what happens if we do these things—live a life that honors the King?

We will never stumble (not meaning we'll be perfect, but we'll consistently be confessing our sin and putting Christ back on the throne of our lives [1 John 1:9]) and we'll receive a "rich welcome" into the eternal kingdom (2 Peter 3:11).

Why would he add the word "rich"? It's very simple. There's a wide range of possibilities as to what kind of welcome you're going to get. If you are ineffective and unproductive, you will get a "poor welcome" into the kingdom of God. These will be the people who narrowly get to heaven, losing everything God wanted for them. Their rewards will be very small in comparison.

But if you are effective and productive (a mature believer), you'll receive a rich welcome.

Jesus also references the idea of having a “rich welcome” but uses different words. He points us to earning great rewards, not small ones. Look at what He says in the context of loving our enemies:

*But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. (Luke 6:35)*

In these simple texts, Jesus and Peter are challenging you and me to the same thing. They are challenging us to live with purpose, to live for the King. If we do this, we will receive a rich welcome into God's kingdom. We will have a great reward!

## **From Significant to Insignificant to Significant**

Nicolaus Copernicus was an astronomer who claimed that the sun didn't revolve around the earth. He claimed that the earth revolved around the sun. He began what was an intellectually slippery slope: the insignificance of man. You see, up until Copernicus, humanity felt that the world—and cosmos—revolved around us. We were at the center. Everything was here for us. We were significant.

But Copernicus' findings put forth a challenge. Maybe we're not that significant. Maybe everything doesn't revolve around us.

When telescopes got better, our significance got even worse. The late 1700's helped us see that not only do we not revolve around the sun, but our sun is in a small cul-de-sac in a small corner of the universe.

Scientists now tell us that the universe is 156 billion light years wide—gulp<sup>34</sup>. Can we even think in those terms? And we're just a small, teeny, tiny planet in one of the smaller galaxies among billions of galaxies.

It really isn't about us. We really appear to be insignificant. The heavens do declare the glory of God,<sup>35</sup> but not the glory of humanity.

But wait! We're supposed to rule over the universe? The

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<sup>34</sup> <http://discovermagazine.com/2005/jan/cosmos-width/>

<sup>35</sup> Psalm 19:1

universe is to be placed in subjection to humanity—all 156 billion light years. Unbelievable. Instead of belittling humanity, the vastness of the universe now magnifies our role. We are going to be called upon by God to rule the cosmos. Of all created beings, we are to reign with Christ. We are back to being significant—by His grace.

He certainly is “lavishing His grace upon us.”

If I'm Saved By Grace, Why Bother With Works?

## Chapter 10: Crying In Heaven?

One morning I talked to one of the pastors of our church about rewards and asked him, “Do you think we’ll all be rewarded the same or differently?”

He cocked his head a little, thinking, and then said, “Probably differently, but it really doesn’t matter. Once you get to heaven, it’s heaven. You’ll be in the presence of God. You’ll see Him face-to-face. Nothing else will matter at that point.”

Though his answer sounded really good, there are some Scripture passages I don’t think he had really dealt with. In Isaiah 25:6-8, Revelation 7:17, and Revelation 21:4, we find a very interesting concept. There will be tears in heaven:

*On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. <sup>7</sup> On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; <sup>8</sup> he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people’s disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken. (Isaiah 25:6-8)*

*For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; “he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” (Revelation 7:17)*

*He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. (Revelation 21:4 ESV)*

Why in the world will there be tears in heaven? Heaven is supposed to be a happy place. We are supposed to be filled with

inexpressible and glorious joy (1 Peter 1:8). Hell is supposed to be a place of the weeping and gnashing of teeth (Luke 13:28). Yet “tears in heaven” is stated in the Scriptures and somehow we have to deal with it.

Since the Revelation 21:4 passage comes after the Great White Throne judgment in Revelation 20 where non-believers are sent to an eternity away from God, some believe that this is referencing tears that will be flowing when we see our loved ones who didn't make it into heaven.<sup>36</sup>

Others think it will be tears flowing from extreme joy. Maybe it's people who made it and were surprised they got there. Maybe it's the pure joy of being face to face with Jesus.

But there are others who think it will be tears flowing because people stood before the judgment seat of Christ and were greatly ashamed of how they lived their lives.<sup>37</sup> It may be at that point that they discovered they had lost something God had wanted for them—their kingdom—and they had lost it forever. They were in heaven, yes. They know God's love, yes. But they wasted their lives and lost the kingdom God had planned for them since the beginning of time.

Is this true? Since we will not be at the Great White Throne, will it happen at the judgment seat of Christ?

The *bema* seat (representing the judgment seat of Christ) was a permanent structure. It wasn't like the movable, folding stands that we have today at the President's inauguration. It was there all year long. As a result, the bema seat served another purpose during the rest of the year. Instead of handing out rewards during the Olympics, it was also used for handing out punishment the rest of the year. Paul knew this personally.

While Paul was in Corinth, the Jews hated what he was doing. They tried to get him in trouble. Therefore they took him to the governor at the “judgment seat,” hoping that Governor Gallio would punish him in some form. This judgment seat is the same bema seat as seen in the text on the next page.

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<sup>36</sup> Many times the Scriptures are very hard to understand. 1 Peter 4:17 tells us that believers are judged first, then the non-believers. So that reason for the tears doesn't seem to really work well.

<sup>37</sup> In Isaiah 25:8 it speaks of removing their “disgrace.”



*Now while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews attacked Paul together and brought him before the judgment seat... (Acts 18:12 NET)*

Mark it down in your gray matter. The bema seat was not only used for rewards, but for handing out punishment as well. Because Paul knew this first hand, he knew that when our lives are judged by our Lord, Jesus will address both possibilities. Note Paul's clear description of good and bad:

*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. (2 Corinthians 5:10)*

What does it mean "receive what is due...for the bad done in the body"? The good is easy to understand: rewards! But what about the bad?

Let's review some key passages and put them together.

## **Can We Lose Our Inheritance?**

To find a scriptural answer for this, we need to go back to the Old Testament. Hebrews 4:1 tell us that what God did to the nation of Israel was to teach us lessons. Therefore a good place to start is to ask, "Did the nation of Israel lose their inheritance?" And the answer is clearly yes. The generation that came out of Egypt lost their inheritance, and Israel as a whole lost their inheritance:

*Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers, our homes to foreigners. (Lamentations 5:2)*

The plight of the Israelites was to be a warning to us. The warning is clear: we can lose our inheritance, too.

Today, many theologians believe the Promised Land was parallel to getting into heaven. As a result, those who made it into the Promised Land (Joshua and Caleb and the future generation) got to heaven. Those who didn't (everyone in the exodus generation besides Joshua and Caleb), didn't make it to heaven.

In other words, because the exodus generation who left

Egypt wasn't strong or courageous and did not follow carefully God's laws, they not only lost out on getting into the Promised Land, they never got to heaven either.

This book is here to say that the Promised Land does not reference getting to heaven, as some theologians believe, but rather getting the full kingdom God wants you to have for eternity future.

If those theologians are correct, then getting to heaven is not merely decided by faith. It is decided by faith and works. If that is the case, there would be no scriptural evidence of anyone from that generation getting to heaven.

Is there any evidence that anyone (besides Joshua and Caleb) of the exodus generation made it to heaven?

A simple search of the New Testament would declare yes. Why? Because Moses was a part of that generation and was judged with the others for disobedience.<sup>38</sup> He never made it into the Promised Land. Yet he appears with Jesus and Elijah!<sup>39</sup> He clearly made it to heaven. (To see much more evidence, please read appendix A.)

It seems pretty clear that we should not be paralleling the Promised Land to reaching heaven. Rather, we should assume the Promised Land is an analogy of us earning our full rewards.

Remember, Jesus gave us a best-case scenario. And that best-case scenario for you and for me is to earn our full inheritance—a personalized kingdom!

*Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world." (Matthew 25:34)*

Though God dreamed up this kingdom to show off His grace for each of us, we are not guaranteed to get it. We can lose it just like the Israelites. This is what Paul is trying to teach the Corinthians, who were living such hypocritical lives:

*If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw,<sup>13</sup> their work will be*

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<sup>38</sup> Numbers 20:12, Deuteronomy 3:23-26

<sup>39</sup> Mark 9:4

*shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. <sup>14</sup> If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames. (1 Corinthians 3:12-15)*

“The Day” Paul is referring to is Judgment Day—us standing before the bema judgment seat of Christ. Jesus’ “fire” will judge our motivations, faithfulness, whole-hearted service, words, opportunities, deeds and thoughts.

If our lives honored the King, they will result in gold, silver or costly stones. If our lives didn't honor the King, they will result in wood, hay or straw. And those get burned up by “judgment fire.”

When they are burned up, we “suffer loss.” That phrase is one Greek word: *zimioo*. (The same we saw in Matthew 16:26: for what will it profit a man if he gains the world and forfeits his soul?) It can be translated as to “affect with damage” or “to do damage to” or “to suffer loss.”

What damage is going to be done? What are they going to lose?

They are going to lose their tailor-made kingdom God had prepared for them since the beginning of time. They are going to lose their inheritance.

Ouch!

Can you imagine standing before Jesus, seeing how selfish your life was, and then realizing that you are not going to get an entire kingdom prepared just for you? Oh, that would hurt.

This also parallels a possible negative judgment Paul is talking about in Colossians. But he says it in a different way. He contrasts rewards right along with being paid for wrongdoing:

*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, <sup>24</sup> since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. <sup>25</sup> Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and*

*there is no favoritism. (Colossians 3:23-25)*

When we think of “anyone who does wrong” we usually assume that Paul is referencing non-believers. But look at the context. Paul is clearly speaking about believers because they are “serving” the Lord. And those “serving” the Lord will be repaid for their wrongs (unless they were confessed as 1 John 1:9 tells us). God shows no favoritism. They are going to lose their kingdom.

No wonder John later exhorts us:

*Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. (2 John 8)*

John was the same one who penned the words in Revelation:

*Then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labor; for their deeds will follow them.” (Revelation 14:13)*

## A Public Rebuke

Not only are they going to lose it, but those rewards are going to be given away to someone else. This is what we learn from the parable of the talents in Luke 19:

*Then he said to those standing by, “Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.”<sup>25</sup> “Sir,” they said, “he already has ten!”<sup>26</sup> He replied, “I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what they have will be taken away.” (Luke 19:24-26)*

If you are catching the scene, this is a form of public rebuke. Others are going to know that this person lost their inheritance.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Some theologians will tell you that this third person wasn't a believer. But the text is clear, the non-believers are referred to as “enemies” in verse 27. This third person is a servant—a believer—who was entrusted with a sum of money from God. God doesn't entrust that to just anyone—only His children. In both Luke 19 and Matthew 25, the third is still called a servant, though a lazy one. He has not been kicked

That kingdom will be given to someone who was faithful and maximized the use of their talents.

Now I don't know about you, but if I were to stand before Christ and see that I wasted my life, realizing that I had lost a kingdom that God had been preparing for me since the beginning of time, and then see it given to someone else who had been faithful—I'd be crying. That would be painful to my soul.

No wonder John writes that existing believers (dear children) can be ashamed:

*And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming. (1 John 2:28)*

If you are mature and continue in Him, you won't be ashamed. If you are immature and don't continue in Him, you will be ashamed.

## **Earn Back Rewards?**

"But will these people be able to earn their rewards back?" you might ask yourself. Eternity is a long time.

The answer is no. This is seen in a couple of passages.

Esau was a man who lost his inheritance. For a single meal, he gave up his birthright inheritance:

*See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done. (Hebrews 12:16)*

When Esau wanted to get it back, he wasn't able to. When he lost it, he lost it for good. Even though he sought it with tears. Even though he was passionate about it. It was denied him. The writer of Hebrews tells us that this was a lesson for us. We can't earn back our inheritance.

Like Esau, Moses also lost his inheritance. He was a very  

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out of the household of God—but he has lost his reward.)

godly man who had believed the Lord to take Israel out from under Egyptian rule. He was the one whom God used to bring about the ten plagues. God used him to part the Red Sea.

But all of the stipulations that applied to the Israelites about getting into the Promised Land applied to him as well. He had to do “all” that the Lord commanded and not turn from the right or left:

*Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. (Joshua 1:7)*

If you are not aware of the story, after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, they came to a place where they had no food or water. God sent manna down from the heavens, but He had Moses strike a rock to bring out water. Moving onward toward the Promised Land, they again needed water and looked to Moses. God told Moses this time to speak to the rock. Unfortunately, Moses didn't trust God enough. He didn't think speaking to the rock would do it. As a result, he struck the rock instead of speaking to it. He did not obey all the Lord had commanded him:

*But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.” (Numbers 20:12)*

As a result, he was not allowed into the Promised Land.

Now imagine being in Moses' shoes. Ever since seeing God free the Israelites from Egypt, Moses had been waiting for the fulfillment of this promise. He had seen the supernatural power of God in feeding His people and in providing for them. Going into the Promised Land was the pinnacle of what God was going to do. It was certainly something Moses didn't want to miss.

As a result, Moses pleaded with the Lord but was rejected:

*At that time I pleaded with the Lord: <sup>24</sup> “Sovereign Lord, you have begun to show to your servant your greatness and your strong hand. For what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do the deeds and mighty*

*works you do? <sup>25</sup> Let me go over and see the good land beyond the Jordan—that fine hill country and Lebanon.” <sup>26</sup> But because of you the Lord was angry with me and would not listen to me. “That is enough.” the Lord said. “Do not speak to me anymore about this matter.” (Deuteronomy 3:23-26)*

These are examples of people who got close to their inheritance but never made it. And God takes it one step further.

What's even worse than not getting into the Promised Land (like Moses) is getting into the Promised Land and still losing it. This is what happened to Achan, an Israelite who had seen the supernatural miracles and power of God. He too had to obey “all” that the Lord had commanded. What was commanded of them going into the Promised Land?

As the Israelites were about to begin their first military conquest, they were instructed to walk around the city seven times, shout, and then attack. (Not exactly a plan the greatest strategic commanders would use today, but it was God's plan to keep them dependent upon Him—and it worked.) As they were to take the city, they were given specific orders:

*But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it. (Joshua 6:18)*

God didn't want them hoarding wealth to themselves. He was testing them to see if they were going to obey Him in the Promised Land. Unfortunately, Achan gave in to temptation:

*But the Israelites were unfaithful in regard to the devoted things; Achan son of Karmi ... took some of them. So the Lord's anger burned against Israel. (Joshua 7:1)*

What resulted from Achan's sin? He was put to death:

*Then all Israel stoned him, and after they had stoned the rest, they burned them. (Joshua 7:25b)*

Here was a man who made it in to the Promised Land, but was not allowed to flourish. He disobeyed the commands of God

and didn't finish strong as Revelation 2:26 and 3:21 demand of us.

Achan was like the third seed in the parable of the seeds:

*The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. (Matthew 13:22)*

Though Achan was obedient up to this point, this lapse into riches kept him from gaining his full inheritance into the Promised Land. Achan teaches us that we can live a life devoted to the Lord for a part of our lives, and then let something creep in that will take us away from the Lord the rest of our lives. We don't finish strong.

Again, remember the exhortation of John:

*Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. (2 John 8)*

In these examples, there were strong emotions. Achan repented. Moses pleaded. Esau sought his inheritance with tears. But their emotional appeal didn't do them any good. They were rejected.

It will be the same for those in heaven on Judgment Day who have wasted their lives away here on the earth. They may come to Jesus with the deepest repentance on Judgment Day. (Remember, our old nature will be gone.) They may seek it with tears. They may plead before God. But the lives they lived on earth are done. There is no second chance to earn their reward, the kingdom prepared personally for them.

God has made it clear:

*Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment. (Hebrews 9:27)*

Our only chance to earn our inheritance is here on this earth. After that, we are judged. We will not be given a chance to earn it back.

Do you realize how important these 80 or so years on this



earth are? This short period of time determines how we will serve the King forever. Decisions you are making every day will determine eternity. Giving away a \$20 bill to a needy person will result in \$2,000 that will last forever.

Don't miss the opportunities God gives you every day. Decisions you make today could result in a huge change 20 million years into Eternity Future. Don't waste your life. If you do, you, like many others, may be crying in heaven. You may have missed your best-case scenario. It will be given to someone else. No wonder the Scriptures speak of tears in that wonderful place.

If I'm Saved By Grace, Why Bother With Works?

## Chapter II: Entitlement and the bride

Many years ago while I was dating my wife, I was exposed to a phenomenal preacher named Frank Barker. In one of his sermons, he spoke about having a mansion in heaven. Having a sense of humor, he spoke about it through a joke. It went something like this:

*Joe and Tom died on the same day. When they got to heaven, Tom was awarded his mansion. It was huge. There was a large entrance, a beautiful living room, den, five bedrooms, a kitchen second to none, and a pool in the backyard. Tom was so happy and couldn't thank Jesus enough.*

*Joe was then taken to his new mansion. It wasn't much bigger than a shack. There were no bedrooms, no official kitchen—it was more like a studio apartment.*

*Joe turned to Jesus and said, "Why is mine so small?"*

*Jesus replied, "I used every bit of scrap lumber you sent me. This was the best I could do."*

I assume you get the idea. The good works you and I do here on earth will determine how large or small our mansion will be in heaven (though now you have a new understanding of what that mansion will actually be).

Because you're reading this book, you are still alive. And if you're still alive, your mansion hasn't been completed yet. You are still "sending lumber ahead of you."

### **Big Picture**

Because we've learned so much thus far, let's stop a second and take a look at the big picture. God wants to put His glory on display for all eternity (Ephesians 2:6,7). He wants to do that by giving us places of authority throughout His kingdom so we can rule and reign with Him on His throne.

Jesus addresses this Eternity Future in different ways. One of the ways he does it is in parable form, talking about a wedding banquet.

*The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son... (Matthew 22:2)*

Somehow, ruling and reigning with Christ has something to do with a wedding banquet.

Many theologians make assumptions about this wedding banquet. We assume that the one holding the banquet is God the Father. We make a second assumption: Jesus is the son in the parable. Therefore, at some point in Eternity Future, God is going to wed His Son, Jesus, to a bride.

People are also invited to the banquet:

*He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come... (Matthew 22:3)*

Hence what you and I (and all humanity) are involved in will result in a wedding between Jesus and His bride. We continue to assume that they will rule and reign over the universe in Eternity Future, showing off the grace of God.

## **Who is the Bride?**

So the big question now becomes, who is the bride? Are we, the church, the bride? Are the Jews? Is it the Holy City that comes down out of heaven?

Honest theologians will write that the Bible is not clear on exactly what or whom the bride is. Because of this, there are many positions. Some will say that the church represents the bride. Others will say that the New Jerusalem represents the bride. Others will say that Israel is the bride. What is challenging is that all of these positions can be backed by Scripture.

What all theologians will agree to is the fact that marriage is often used as an analogy between God and believers. God is trying to communicate the closeness of a relationship that He wants to have with us and the covenantal nature of it. We see this analogy in both the Old and New Testaments.

In the Old Testament, Hosea was to take a promiscuous woman, Gomer, to be his wife. This was to be a picture of God taking unfaithful Israel as a wife (Hosea 1:2,3).

In Isaiah 62:5, we see that God rejoices over us like a bridegroom rejoices over his bride. More evidence that His people are the bride.

In the New Testament, men are to love their wives just as Christ loved the church. (Ephesians 5:25) This would allude to the fact that we, the church, are going to be the bride of Christ.

Paul says that he is presenting the church as a virgin to one husband, Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2). This would make the church the bride.

Whatever the analogy is, it is clear that God wants intimacy with His children. It is an intimacy that parallels that of a sweet marriage.

Since evangelicals are the primary readers of this book, I want to show the Scripture that supports the two most prominent views of evangelicals. The first is that we, the church, are the bride. The second is that the New Jerusalem is the bride.

### **Position #1:**

When it comes to the New Testament, it is easy to assume that we, the church, are going to be that bride. We get this from the Apostle Paul's words in Corinthians.

*I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. (2 Corinthians 11:2)*

If Christ is to be our husband, and we are virgins, the text must mandate that there is going to be a wedding and we are the bride. It can't be that He is already our husband and we're still virgins. That would be a poor analogy. Therefore it must be saying that there is some type of an engagement. We are "engaged" to Christ to be His bride in the future.

Paul also speaks of this relationship in his letter to the Ephesians in chapter 5 verses 22 and 23.

*For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.*

If Christ is the head of the church as the husband is the head of the wife, then the analogy that we are to be his wife (starting off as a bride) is correct.

It is also found in the challenge to husbands.

*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her... (Ephesians 5:25)*

Revelation also points us to the fact that the bride is going to be made up of those from the church.

*Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. <sup>8</sup> Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.) (Revelation 19:7<sup>b</sup>,8)*

From this passage we see that the bride had to make herself ready. It seems to indicate that the bride was made ready by wearing fine linen, bright and clean. But this fine linen is represented by the righteous acts of God's holy people. Therefore, believers are making themselves ready by doing good works. Therefore, that would mean that we, the church, would be the bride of Christ.

All of these analogies fit in perfectly with Matthew 22.

*The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son... (Matthew 22:2)*

"Yes," cry one group of evangelicals, "God is preparing a wedding banquet for Jesus and we, the church, are going to be the bride. It all fits together nicely. What an amazing, generous God."

## **Position #2:**

But there is another group of Evangelicals. They will have a couple of problems with the first position. They are:

- The phrase "bride of Christ" is nowhere in the New Testament, even though you will continually hear people

speak about it as if it were Scripture itself.

- Whenever Paul speaks about the church, he references us as being the “body of Christ” never the “bride of Christ.”
- If the Church is the bride, as Revelation 19 seems to indicate, then believers get to be a part of the bride by “works”—which goes totally against the idea that we are saved by grace. (Those who take this position have not differentiated between having their names *recorded* in heaven and being *rewarded* in heaven.)
- Jesus says that in heaven we will neither marry nor be given in marriage. (Matthew 22:30)

Position #2 would also say, “The Scriptures are clear what the bride is. You can find it in Revelation, chapter 21.”

*“Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”<sup>10</sup> And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God,<sup>11</sup> having the glory of God... (Revelation 21:9<sup>b</sup>-11<sup>a</sup>)*

Those who hold position #2 say that the bride is clearly the holy city of Jerusalem—not people.

But those in Position #1 would question this position. How can Christ marry a city? He died for people, not for physical buildings. It wouldn't make sense for Christ to marry a city.

They would add that in the Greek, as well as the English language, a person and a place can often be used interchangeably. The prodigal son says:

*I have sinned against heaven and against you. (Luke 15:18<sup>b</sup>)*

By saying he has sinned against heaven, he is communicating that he has sinned against God. The place and the person were interchangeable.

We do the same in English. If we say, “San Francisco is a liberal city,” we're not talking about the buildings. We're talking

about the people of San Francisco.

Yet in Colossians 1:19,20, we find that Christ died for “all things in heaven and on earth.” So, yes, in one sense He died for people and all things—animals, plants, planets, stars, etc. The “city” could be all of creation (the new heavens and earth and the people in it) represented symbolically in the city of Jerusalem.

Either way, it can be tough determining which of the two positions is correct. Position #1 makes assumptions. Position #2 has clear Scripture to back it up, but those that counter it also have reasonable arguments. (No wonder theologians disagree on exactly who the bride is!)

## Invited Guests

In either case, something else is clear about the wedding banquet. Guests are supposed to come.

*The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. <sup>3</sup> He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come. (Matthew 22:2,3<sup>a</sup>)*

*Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. <sup>8</sup> Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people.) <sup>9</sup> Then the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” (Revelation 19:7<sup>b</sup>-9)*

In both passages, guests are supposed to come to the banquet. These guests can play one of two roles.

If the church is the bride, then they are invited to come to the banquet and will be totally surprised when they will find out that they are actually the bride! Or, if the city is the bride, the church is invited to watch the wedding. In either case, the text is clear that there is a great blessing for those who are guests.

In general, most churches in Christendom believe that the church makes up the bride of Christ. I have no problem with this position. But in light of understanding the difference between



having our names recorded in heaven and being rewarded in heaven, I have found a problem with an assumption they make.

Most Christians believe all Christians will *automatically* be a part of the bride of Christ. They are entitled to it by what Christ has done for them on the cross. I am not so sure of that.

If the bride is made up of the church, and if the bride is prepared by the righteous acts of God's people, then it seems to be communicating that the bride will be made up of believers who have "overcome" and been "faithful to the end" (Nikeo Christians). These will be the ones who will sit with Christ on His throne. These will be the ones who are the bride.

This also ties in perfectly with Revelation 3:21. If we are overcomers, we can sit with Christ on His throne. Now, if we are on the throne with Christ, it would fit that we are His bride. This then could equate being His bride with getting our full inheritance—getting our kingdom. This could mean that those who get their full rewards, their kingdom, are a part of the bride of Christ.

If this is true, it means that not everyone in the body of Christ will be a part of the bride of Christ because not every believer is an "overcomer." Some will get in by the "skin of their teeth" (1 Corinthians 3:15).

## The Entitlement Church

Something dawned on me one morning as I was thinking about the assumption that *all* believers will be a part of the bride of Christ. If all believers will be a part of the bride, then it must come to us through what Christ has done on the cross. His death on the cross must *credit us with good works* that will allow us to sit with Him on the cross.

Below is a list of Scriptures that talk about what Christ's death actually did for us on the cross. Put a check mark by those that indicate Christ has given us "good works" that will be credited to us through His death and see if what dawned on me will dawn on you.

- "He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." (Colossians 1:13,14)

- “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence.” (Colossians 1:7,8)
- “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” (Hebrews 8:12)
- “For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!” (Romans 5:10)
- “So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.” (Romans 5:18)
- “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.” (1 Corinthians 15:3)
- “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)
- “...and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.” (Colossians 1:20)
- “...having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” (Colossians 2:14)
- “...knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19 but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.” (1 Peter 1:18,19)
- “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.” (1 Peter 3:18)

- “and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.” (1 John 2:2)

If you didn't put down any check marks, let's review some of the key concepts.

Being reconciled means an exchange—Christ's perfect life for our sinful life. We can now be in God's perfect presence as perfect and holy people. It does not mean Christ's perfect good works will take the place of our terrible choices. No other text gives any indication of this at all.

Being justified means “just as if I'd never sinned.” It doesn't mean “just as if I'd done all the good works in the world.” That is far more what sanctification means, but sanctification isn't used there.

Being redeemed means being released as one from ransom. It, too, gives zero indication that good works are added to us through this redemption. It simply means that nothing will be held against us that will keep us out of heaven.

Most of the Scriptures speak directly about the forgiveness of sins. When our sins are forgiven, we can go to heaven. There is no hoping, guessing, or wondering. We can be sure we have a relationship with Christ and, therefore, sure of our eternal destination of heaven.

None of those verses point us to a belief that Christ's death not only took away our sin, but also gave us good works that can be counted on our behalf so that we can rule and reign with Him on His throne—none of them.

What does this mean?

It means that when we become a Christian, we are guaranteed to get to heaven. We are righteous, holy and pure by Christ's blood. But being seated in heaven (Ephesians 2:6) means *we start out with “zero-balance” in respect to good works. Those good deeds have to be earned as we have seen.*

I've always heard speakers say that being a Christian means “we don't get what we deserve.” This was referencing hell. In other words, we deserve to go to hell, but we're not going there. Then those speakers would finish the phrase with, “We get what we don't deserve.” To them, this means we get to go to heaven

and be the bride.

Although I agree the second part of that phrase means we will reach heaven, I don't agree that it *automatically* means we get to be the bride. That is something that the Scriptures seem to indicate has to be earned—because it represents our inheritance.

As I was teaching on this, I ran across Colossians 1:12, which startled me because it totally contradicted all I believed to be true.

*and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. (Colossians 1:12 NIV)*

When I read that, I was shocked. How could Paul write that? The Father has qualified us to share in the inheritance? That goes against the idea that we are at a “zero-balance” with respect to good works. It also means that we all are qualified to be a part of the bride of Christ. I couldn't believe what I was reading.

But then I wondered, “Hmm, what is the definition of that Greek word qualified?” Look at how it is defined:

- to make sufficient, render fit
- to equip one with adequate power to perform duties of one

When I read the second part of the definition, what Paul was trying to say dawned on me. He's saying that the Father has equipped us with everything we need (power through the Holy Spirit) to obey Him (perform our duties) so we can earn our inheritance! It is *not saying we are entitled to our inheritance*. We still have to earn it. (I don't think the translators—whom I respect greatly—did a great job of translating that verse.)

Paul's words echo the same idea we find in Peter's letter:

*His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. (2 Peter 1:3)*

We've got everything we need. We are equipped by God. But we are the ones who have to live the godly life through the power of His Holy Spirit. We are not on our own, but we are accountable to live a holy life. We have a responsibility.

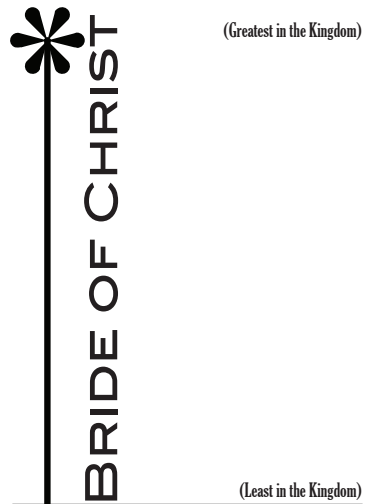
Just as there are different levels of punishment in hell (“many blows” Luke 12:47), I want to challenge you that there are *different levels of rewards* in heaven. (Remember, there will be the *least* in the kingdom of heaven and the *greatest* in the



kingdom of heaven.)

The above graph shows us what possible rewards could look like when we first come to know Christ.

The problem is that many people in the church think that simply because they have invited Christ into their lives, *they automatically join the Bride of Christ*, as seen on the right. And as a part of the bride, then there might be different rewards. But to become a part of the bride, all they had to do was invite Jesus into their lives. They were entitled to it by Jesus’ death. They’ve consistently been taught it is about grace, grace, grace—



and that applies to becoming a part of the bride of Christ.

Yes, getting into heaven is about grace (entering), but the Scriptures seem to indicate that becoming a part of the bride of Christ is about rewards (inheriting). God's Word points us to the fact that we earn our rewards. Although they are done in the power of the Holy Spirit, which is grace, they are still earned and "credited" to our "account."

This entitlement mentality goes against Revelation 19:17 that says the bride was clothed with the righteous acts of the saints. If becoming a part of the bride of Christ is something all believers get, it should have read, "clothed with the righteous acts of Jesus."

## May Receive the Inheritance

So where in the Scripture might we find an indication that Christ's death gets us to "zero-balance," and we have to earn our inheritance? Look on the next page:

*And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.*  
(Hebrews 9:15)

This passage talks about Christ's life as a "new covenant" which parallels the "old covenant." The first part of the verse, therefore, is talking about Christ taking away our sins. Then notice what it says. Those who have been "called" (that is, those who have had their sin taken away), *may* receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. The "eternal inheritance" is talking about rewards and some may get it. This implies, however, that not everyone will get it.

The actual Greek word for may is *lambanō*. Look at some of the ways it can be defined:

- to take what is one's own, to take to one's self, to make one's own
- to claim, procure, for one's self
- to seize, to lay hold of, apprehend

- to take by craft (our catch, used of hunters, fisherman, etc.)
- to appropriate to one's self
- catch at, reach after, strive to obtain

Those are "action" words (seize, claim, procure, strive). They're talking about works. Works require effort. This points us to inheriting, not entering. This means that we have a responsibility as believers to live a godly life.

What the writer of Hebrews may be saying is, "*Christ's death has taken away your sin. You are redeemed. But you have zero rewards to your credit. Now it is up to you. Go and strive to obtain the inheritance that He ultimately wants for you. Earn the kingdom prepared for you since the beginning of time.*"

This would also fit nicely with Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians. He could be saying, "*I've presented you to Christ as a pure virgin. You are now saved. Your sin is gone. But you have a "zero balance" in the good works department and you are not doing anything to build that up. Wake up and do good works to earn your inheritance.*"

This also agrees with the church in Revelation, chapter 3. Look what is spoken about the church in Sardis:

*I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up. Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. (Revelation 3:1<sup>b</sup>,2)*

By saying "wake up," the angel is saying, "Do good works. Those good works are unfinished in the sight of God." Now look at the first part of verse four:

*Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. (Revelation 3:4<sup>a</sup>)*

What does "soiled their clothes" mean? It means they are dirty. They are not white. Therefore they have not done good deeds. They don't have good works. White does represent those who have done good deeds. What happens to these who are "unsoiled"?

*They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. (Revelation 3:4<sup>b</sup>)*

The words “white” and “worthy” are key. They have done good deeds and, therefore, are found worthy of God to receive their rewards. They will be “friends” with Jesus.

## **The First, The Last and King of kings**

In Jesus’ concluding words to his disciples who asked about their own rewards, Jesus says the following:

*But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first. (Matthew 19:30)*

The word “first” can accurately be translated, “first in rank.” “Last” can accurately be translated, “lowest rank.” Hence what Jesus was trying to tell his disciples (and trying to tell us) is this:

*“Whoever is of the highest rank here on earth, will be the lowest rank in heaven. But whoever is the lowest rank on earth (a servant of all) will be of the highest rank in heaven.”*

The highest in rank is that of a king.

Now, Christ’s eternal name is the “King of kings” (Revelation 17:14, 19:16). This could mean one of two things.

First, He is the King of all the kings here on this earth. But since this earth and their kings will pass away, that seems pretty weak to have a name like that which last such a short while—in comparison to eternity.

Secondly, it could easily point us to the fact that we, the bride of Christ, will be kings. His eternal name means that he will be the King of all kings (His bride) throughout the universe. He shall not only rule over us, but with us as well. We will be the kings He is ruling over. His eternal name is the King of kings.

## **Let’s Review**

Before we jump to any definite conclusions, let’s take a step backwards. Let’s review what is clear and unclear.

- There’s going to be a wedding feast. (We’re sure of that—Matthew 22:1.)



- Guests are going to be invited. (We're sure of this too—Matthew 22:2,3.)
- Jesus' death makes us holy and pure (so we can be in heaven) but gives us zero rewards.
- We're not exactly sure who is going to be the bride.

Because we're not exactly sure who the bride is—and because we know there are wedding guests — there are three possibilities to consider. In light of what we are learning in this chapter about having zero rewards when we come to know Christ, we can make these assumptions:

1. If we are the bride, then Scripture implies that some Christians who have lived selfishly in the church may not be a part of the bride of Christ. They'll be in heaven, but not a part of the bride, because they did not overcome to the end. They didn't earn any rewards. They will have lost (forfeited) their inheritance—the right to rule and reign with Christ on His throne.
2. If we are not the bride, we will be the guests. But, those Christians who have lived selfishly in the church may not be invited into the wedding banquet to celebrate. They'll be in heaven, but be excluded from the blessing of watching the wedding take place. That would also mean they have lost (forfeited) their inheritance.

And I believe there is a third option in taking a closer look at Revelation 19:7-9. It can imply that there are three options. See if you catch three possibilities by reading it again below:

*Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. <sup>8</sup> Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.) <sup>9</sup> Then the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" And he added, "These are the true words of God." (Revelation 19:7-9)*

It is possible to read into this text that some are invited to be a part of the bride and *others are invited to attend the wedding banquet but aren't a part of the bride*. We get this if we assume

that verse 9 is referencing a totally different group of people than verse 8. Could this be?

Think through it, which bride gets an invitation to her own wedding? None. She, and her groom, initiate the invitations. They are focal point. They don't get invited. Their friends and family get invited.

It can read that these are different people. There are those who made themselves ready (verse 8) and are the bride. And there are those who get to attend the wedding banquet but didn't finish as strongly as they could have. So with this new possibility, we see a third alternative.

3. If believers are the bride, this may mean that some believers (faithful to the end—Nike Christians) will be a part of *the bride*. Secondly, those who didn't get their full rewards and didn't hear the words “well done” but who were rewarded (five cities—Luke 19:19), will be blessed to be invited *as guests only*. Thirdly, those who lived totally selfish lives may not be a part of the bride and *may not be allowed in as guests* to see the wedding ceremony take place.

Because I was an Eagle Boy Scout as a child, I was always taught to be prepared. And in being prepared, I like to be prepared for a worst-case scenario. I believe scenario #3 would be the worst-case scenario.

As a result, the rest of this book will focus on the idea that there will be *some* Christians who will be a part of the bride. *Other* Christians who could have done more for God's Kingdom, will be invited *as guests only* and not be a part of the bride. And *there will be others* who, though they trusted in Jesus for salvation, they weren't family (Luke 8:21) or friends (John 15:14). They wasted their lives and are *not going to be invited to the banquet at all*, but will still be in heaven.

Could I be wrong? Absolutely. But if I'm right, I'd rather be prepared for the worst-case scenario and will be held accountable for preparing you as well.

## Chapter 12: A Broken Engagement

Broken engagements happen every year. Whether it be cold feet, a gut feeling, meeting someone new, or a myriad of other reasons, people who were once engaged never make it to marriage with that particular person.

For better or maybe for worse, records are not usually kept on these broken engagements. However, in an online national poll of 565 single adults conducted in August of 2003 by [Match.com/Zoomerang](http://Match.com/Zoomerang) for TIME, 20% said they had broken off an engagement in the past three years, and 39% said they knew someone else who had done so.<sup>41</sup>

Wow! Almost 40% of people engaged never make it to the altar.

Now think through what most evangelical churches believe: we, the church, are to be the bride of Christ. Remember, this comes from many texts, but here is Paul's:

*For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:2 ESV)*

Yet the wedding ceremony hasn't happened yet. As a result, we need to consider ourselves engaged to Him.

Assuming we are engaged to Him, is there any biblical evidence that "not making it to the altar" or "not being invited to the wedding banquet" is a possibility? Do the Scriptures tell us that our engagement might be broken?

Yes, it seems as if there is biblical evidence.

### Two Heirs

Our biblical evidence comes in a myriad of places, but let's start in Romans. If you'll recall, we are to be co-heirs with Christ:

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<sup>41</sup> <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,490683,00.html>

*The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. <sup>17</sup> Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Romans 8:16,17)*

An heir is someone who inherits something once his or her parents pass on. When my mom died 19 years after my father's death, my siblings and I were finally given our inheritance. We split up our parents' assets four equal ways. That is what usually happens to heirs.

But finding the exact meaning of co-heir is difficult. Some believe it means getting into heaven while others believe it means being rewarded in heaven. Two differing theologies come about because there are two meanings for the word heir in the Scriptures.

The first is being an heir to God. These are ones whose names have been recorded in heaven. They have reached out to God by faith and have asked Him to save them; they are trusting in Him. The second are those who are heirs to the universe. They get to co-rule and reign with Christ.

We learn this from the Old Testament. You already know that Israel was to inherit the Promised Land.

*But you will cross the Jordan and settle in the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, and he will give you rest from all your enemies around you so that you will live in safety. (Deuteronomy 12:10)*

All of Israel was to have it—except the Levites. God gave them a different inheritance—God Himself.

*That is why the Levites have no share or inheritance among their fellow Israelites; the Lord is their inheritance, as the Lord your God told them. (Deuteronomy 10:9)*

The Levite inheritance was the Lord alone. They didn't get to share in the land. Therefore, "inheritance" can have two meanings. One is getting into the Promised Land—earning your full rewards; the other is simply having a relationship with God—

implying merely having a relationship with God and not getting the rewards.

In our beta-test class with the Areté homeschool students, one student asked, “So who got the better deal—the 11 tribes who got the land or the 1 tribe who got God?” That was a great question. The answer is, “The ones who got God and the land,” but it is not as clear of an answer as you might think.

You see, there were Levites (the one tribe who was supposed to get God) who weren't walking with God and didn't get anything. We see this in Eli's sons who were sinning in their duties as priests and with whom God was very displeased (1 Samuel 2:12-25). God took their lives.

There were also those who were promised the land, but who disobeyed and were killed. This was Achan's story in Joshua chapter 7.

But there were others who weren't priests and who not only got the land, but got God as well. We see this in Joshua. He was from one of the other 11 tribes (Number 13:8,16) and he wanted God more than anything else. We see this as Joshua would stay in the very presence of God instead of going back to his people (Exodus 33:11). He was far more interested in God than in the land.

For us, having a relationship with God and getting rewards is the best-case scenario!

## Moving The Comma?

Romans 8:16 seems to be implying the use of both “heirs” by the choice of words Paul uses when he calls the Romans “children.”

Remember, the Greek language has three words for the English word child. Two of them (*tekna* and *huioi*) are used by Paul in this passage. *Tekna* refers to children or simply offspring. *Huioi* takes it a step further. Not only are you a child, but you are a student or obedient child—a mature child.<sup>42</sup> Paul uses them both in the chapter.

If you'll recall, in the first 13 verses of the chapter, Paul is showing the difference between walking in the power of the Holy Spirit and walking in our own fleshly strength. He concludes in

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<sup>42</sup> *Reign of the Servant Kings*, Joseph Dillow, pages 378,379

verse 14 that those who walk according to the Spirit are mature children:

*For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children (huioi) of God. (Romans 8:14)*

To say that those who are led by the Spirit of God are mature believers makes a lot of sense. They would be those who are on course to finish well.

He then goes on to say that God's Spirit brings about this maturity, not through slavery (to rules), but by a personal relationship with God:

*The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship (huioi). And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." (Romans 8:15)*

Paul then backtracks and says even if we somehow miss learning how to be mature and walk in the power of God, we still have a relationship with Him by the same Spirit:

*The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children (tekna). (Romans 8:16)*

By using both terms for children, he is subtly communicating to his readers that he is very much aware of the difference between the two types of children and wants them to be aware of those differences as well.

Now look again at the passage. Note that *tekna* children are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.

*The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children (tekna).<sup>17</sup> Now if we are children (tekna), then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Romans 8:16,17)*

This seems to imply that these same "*tekna*-immature-children" will be co-heirs with Christ, "if indeed we share in his sufferings..." Therefore it further implies that all children (mature or not mature) will suffer for Christ and reign with Christ. But

if you think about it for a second, that doesn't make much sense. Immature believers are not going to suffer for Christ. They're going to run. They're not going to stand up for Christ.

The text reads this way because of where the second comma is located. Now this comma was not put there by Paul. The original Greek had no commas, periods, or paragraph breaks. Remember, these are put in by modern-day translators who tried to make the Scripture easier for us to understand.

To see what a difference the location of a comma can make, look closely at where many translators felt the second comma should go:

*The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children (tekna).<sup>17</sup> Now if we are children (tekna), then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Romans 8:16,17)*

Joseph Dillow challenged me that this comma is in the wrong place. Why? Because if the original placement is correct, it would be saying that *tekna* children (any offspring who is not necessarily mature) is going to rule and reign with Christ and suffer with Him, sharing in His glory. But again, it is rarely a non-mature believer who is going to suffer. Usually only mature ones will suffer. Most immature just fall away when the tough times come. It is usually only the mature who suffer.

But if you placed the second comma in a different place, a whole new meaning comes out. Take a look at this slight change:

*The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.<sup>17</sup> Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God, and co-heirs with Christ if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Romans 8:16,17)*

What difference does this make?

## Not A Part Of The Bride?

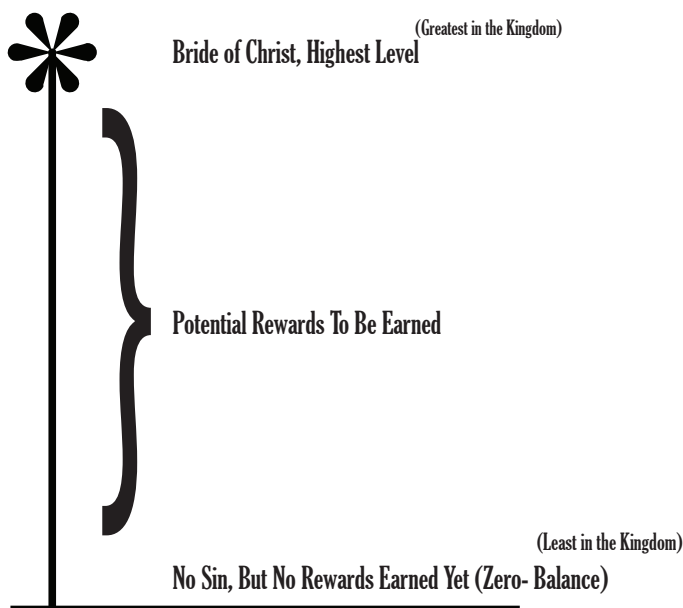
With the new placement, it means Paul is referring to the two different types of children that he has been talking about in

the previous verses. The *tekna* children are immature but have a relationship with God. They are descendants of God. The *huioi* children (those led by the Spirit of God whom he just referred to 3 verses earlier) are mature (friends of God—Nike™ Christians) and will suffer for Christ and reign with Him.

It means that *tekna* children will all have a relationship with God the Father throughout eternity as His children. They will have entered the kingdom of God. Their names will be recorded in heaven. They are heirs of God like the Levites. God is their inheritance. But like the Levites, they are not getting the land—the full reward.

But after that second comma, Paul is referencing another type of child. He is referring to the mature children who are led by the Spirit of God. They are going to be co-heirs with Christ and will rule and reign with Him forever. They are the ones who will stick-it-out during suffering. They are the Nike™ Christians. These mature believers get the land, the kingdom God planned for them since the beginning of time.

This slight comma change would point us to the first graph:



As a young believer, I always assumed that every believer was going to be a part of the bride of Christ. Now that I see what a comma placement change can do, I do not hold firmly to that



belief any more. Though we are betrothed to Christ, it doesn't mean we are going to make it to the altar. Our engagement may be broken. *We are not entitled to be the bride. We have to earn it.*

If we are not victorious and faithful to the end—Nike™ Christians—our engagement will be broken off. Jesus will “break off the engagement” because of the life we wasted here on earth. (Or we will not be invited as guests to the wedding.)

## No Way

“That’s terrible,” you might want to be screaming in your spirit. “I don’t believe that. No way would God ditch us.”

Not so fast. Jeremiah 3:8 tells us that God divorced Israel in the Old Testament. Breaking off an engagement is less offensive. If He’s divorced His people, He can certainly break off an engagement.

If He breaks it off, do we lose our salvation? No. This has nothing to do with salvation. It has everything to do with losing our rewards. It means we will have lost the right to sit with Jesus on His throne (as a bride) and rule and reign with Him. We will have lost our personalized kingdom.

I do believe every believer (*tekna* and *huioi*) will be in heaven and have a relationship with God the Father. Their names have been recorded in heaven. They’ve made it to heaven with a “zero-balance” in their works department. But not every believer will be sitting with Christ on His throne ruling and reigning forever. Only those who are faithful to the end (*huioi* children, friends of God) will get that honor. They will be the ones who are willing to suffer and share with Christ in His glory.

## The Universe

So what do we inherit as a mature believer—a co-heir with Christ? It means that whatever Christ inherits, we inherit as well. So a logical question should be, “What does Christ inherit?”

The answer is found in the first chapter of Hebrews:

*In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he*

*appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. (Hebrews 1:1,2)*

When I'm speaking on this to my audiences, I ask them the question, "What does 'all things' mean?" They typically reply with "all things." Since you're not supposed to define a word by the word itself, I ask them to go deeper. "Does it mean this building?" They shake their heads yes. "Does it mean the trees outside?" Again, yes. "How about the mountains, the clouds, the sky?" They are constantly shaking their heads yes. "How about the sun, or our galaxy...or the universe." They keep shaking their heads yes.

By now, some are getting the implications. You and I—if we finish strong—are going to co-inherit the universe! Did you read over that too quickly and not catch the breath-taking significance? We are going to inherit the universe. We're not merely talking about planets, we're talking about solar systems and galaxies!

This ties in perfectly with Jesus saying, "In My Father's house are many mansions and I go and prepare a place for you!"

And what will be our job in it? Sitting with Christ on His throne (as His bride) and ruling and reigning over it. And your kingdom will be tailor-made just for you. You'll be a perfect fit.

"But wait a minute," someone might retort, "in the parable of the talents, the greatest reward was 10 cities, not galaxies!"

Yes, that is true. But the Scriptures seem to indicate that they did not know what a galaxy was. The Scriptures do not differentiate between "heaven and stars" and galaxies. (It was a millennia or two before they knew the difference between the sun revolving around the earth or visa-versa.) Because their knowledge was so limited, had Jesus referenced galaxies, He probably would have totally lost them. Therefore he used a simple analogy, cities.

## **More Evidence**

What other Scriptures point to the fact that there are some believers who will not be invited or be a part of the bridal party? Let's go back to the wedding banquet parable in Matthew.

*Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: <sup>2</sup> “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. (Matthew 22:1,2)*

As the parable goes on, we find out that those who had been initially invited decide not to come. There was something wrong. They weren't worthy.

*Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. (Matthew 22:8 ESV)*

Not worthy, what does that mean? Well, what does the rest of Scripture say you need to get into the wedding feast? You need to be holy (which can only be done by trusting in Christ's shed blood on the cross) and be found faithful to the end. Therefore there are two possibilities.

The first is that they were neither holy nor had they finished strong. This could mean their names were neither recorded in heaven nor were they rewarded in heaven.

The second possibility is that they had trusted Christ. They were holy (positionally), but it doesn't look as if they had finished well in their life. Their names were recorded in heaven, but they weren't rewarded in heaven. They were stuck at the lowest level with zero rewards credited to them. They were like the church in Sardis in Revelation 3.

If what I am writing is true and we are not all a part of the bride of Christ, those invited were not allowed to be a part of the wedding and/or they weren't invited as guests. Their engagement would have been broken off. Let's see where the text points us.

In the story, the owner of the house sends out a message to invite any and every one that can be found. Many come. Now the key to this parable is found in verses 11 and 12:

*But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. <sup>12</sup> He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless.*

Here is a man at the wedding banquet but he is not properly

dressed, which was a real no-no for a wedding. Proper attire was required. So what happens to him?

*Then the king said to the servants, "Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*  
(Matthew 22:13 NASB)

Many theologians believe that this person wasn't a believer and he got cast out to hell. But a closer look at other Scripture makes this impossible. Why?

Jesus starts the parable saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like..." In other words, this man was "in the kingdom of heaven." And according to Jesus in John 3:3, "*No one can see the kingdom of heaven unless he is born again.*" Therefore, one must conclude that this man was born again. So it sounds like his name was recorded in heaven, trusting in Christ's shed blood, but he wasn't going to be rewarded. Why?

Because he is not dressed properly. To show up at the King's home improperly dressed was a sign of disrespect. What does the wrong clothing imply? The text of Matthew 22 doesn't give us any insight. But remember, we do get clarification from Revelation 19:

*Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; <sup>8</sup> it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.* (Revelation 19:7-8)

I used to think that the "righteous deeds of the saints" pointed us to what Christ had done for us. It was His righteous deeds that we could now claim—therefore they were ours. But it says "the righteous deeds of the saints" not "the righteous deeds of Christ." These are the deeds of the saints. I believed this because I assumed it was talking about entering heaven, not gaining our inheritance. Now that I know the difference, it is clearly the righteous deeds of the saints.

This person who has come to the wedding banquet improperly dressed didn't have their own righteous deeds. This person

was saved. This person had trusted in Christ for salvation. But he had zero rewards credited to him. This person's name had been recorded in heaven. But he was not to be a part of the wedding banquet because he didn't live a life with good works. He didn't overcome. He wasn't going to be rewarded.

Now comes the hardest part of the parable to wrestle with:

*Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."  
(Matthew 22:13 ESV)*

To a casual reader, this seems to imply that the man was cast into hell. Why? Because he's in darkness where there is weeping of gnashing of teeth.

But remember, he is in the kingdom. According to Jesus, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. So how could he be tossed into hell? There is a fixed chasm no one can cross between the two.<sup>43</sup> We're going to look at the three components of this verse: the weeping and gnashing of teeth first, then the outer darkness, then the fact that he was bound.

## **Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth**

The phrase "weeping and gnashing of teeth" is a Hebrew way of simply expressing "profound regret."<sup>44</sup> That is the simple and plain meaning of it. Yes, there will be profound regret in hell, and that is why it is used many times in that context. But it doesn't always mean hell. You've got to let the context determine the meaning, not a biased theology!

There will also be profound regret realizing you wasted your life, didn't get your personalized kingdom, and didn't get to be a part of the bride of Christ. Could this be the point of the "weeping and gnashing of teeth?" Do you think you would have profound regret if you realized you lost all of those things?

I, and others, say absolutely yes. The weeping and gnashing of teeth can be referencing severe regret in heaven on Judgment Day for losing your kingdom. That is why there will be tears in

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<sup>43</sup> Luke 16:26

<sup>44</sup> *Final Destiny*, Joseph Dillow, page 779-782.

heaven.

## Outer Darkness

The other part we must address is the “outer darkness.” Again, most theologians assume this is a direct reference to hell. There are many places where darkness does refer to hell, but don’t apply that to all the usages. (Again, use the context not a biased theology.)

Look at Matthew 4:

*“...the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” (Matthew 4:16)*

These people were living in darkness yet they saw a great light. Matthew is talking about Gentiles here on this earth that recognized Jesus, repented, and followed him. Therefore the darkness referred to here is not hell. It is simply a “blindness” or simply unawareness of who Jesus is.

Scripturally, darkness can reference trouble and affliction (Proverbs 20:20), moral depravity (Psalm 82:5, Proverbs 2:13) or death and nothingness (1 Samuel 2:9, Ecclesiastes 11:8). It does not necessarily reference hell.

And this is not a regular darkness, but an “outer” darkness. Why was the word “outer” added?

Remember the big picture. Those who have been faithful will be shining like the sun. They will be in the wedding banquet hall getting ready to be wed to Christ. Those outside the wedding banquet are saved—but not allowed in. They will be shining like stars.

Now in Jewish culture, weddings usually took place at night. So think through this with me. Inside there will be suns—brilliantly shining. Outside there will be stars.

Relatively speaking, those not invited to be a part of the bride of Christ will be in darkness compared to those in the wedding hall shining like suns. They will be right next to those inside the wedding banquet, hence it is an “outer darkness.”

They will have lost their kingdom. They will not be a part of

the bride of Christ. There will be profound regret. There will be the weeping and gnashing of teeth.

## **Bind Him**

Now note what happens to this man:

*Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' (Matthew 22:13 ESV)*

First, he is bound hand and foot. What does that mean? Does it literally mean bound hand and foot? Maybe.

But it could be an analogy for something else. When a person is bound hand and foot, they are unable to do any kind of work. They can't walk or perform anything meaningful with their hands. They are extremely restricted.

If this is an analogy, what are they restricted from doing? Hopefully it is obvious to you. They will be restricted from ruling and reigning with Jesus on His throne. It is another way of saying they will "suffer loss" as in 1 Corinthians 3:15.

This person who was found at the wedding banquet was a believer, but he didn't have a life full of good works. As a result, he was not allowed to be a part of the bride and rule and reign with Christ throughout the universe. He will be severely restricted. And perhaps he was not invited to view the wedding itself and missed out on a great blessing.

This would make our graph look like this on the following page:



**Fully Rewarded:**

(Greatest in the Kingdom)

**Rich Welcome, Overcomers, Ten Cities,  
Bride of Christ, Nike Christians, Shine like the Sun**

**Partially Rewarded:**

**Not a Full Welcome. Five Cities,  
Possibly Wedding Guests Only, Shine like the Moon  
(Didn't Hear "Well Done" but Got Some Rewards)**

**No Rewards:**

(Least in the Kingdom)

**No Sin, But No Rewards Earned (Zero-Balance),  
Shine like Stars, Not Allowed Into The Wedding Banquet**

Ouch. Imagine living your life for Christ and then being sidetracked somewhere along the line. Maybe it was worries about finances. Maybe it was worries about retirement. Maybe you became dissatisfied with your spouse and had major marital problems. You never stopped going to church. You kept wearing the badge "Christian." But whatever the case, your light went out half way through your life.

Men and women, take this to heart. You may get to heaven, but you may lose your personalized kingdom. You may not be a part of the bride or be invited to the wedding banquet.

You may be "winning" because you are a believer, but you can be "losing" by wasting your life.

## **But Won't We Be Satisfied?**

Believe it or not, there are some people who don't care if they lose their kingdom. I have heard first-hand testimonies of this. If their lives on earth result in them living in a shack instead of a mansion in heaven, that's okay with them. They hold this opinion because they know of something in the Psalms that excites them:



*You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. (Psalm 16:11)*

First, they'll be filled with joy. They'll have eternal pleasures.

Who cares if you are filled with joy in a shack or a mansion? Who cares if you are enjoying eternal pleasures in a shack or a mansion? You'll still be full of joy. You'll still have eternal pleasures. And our old natures will be gone so there will be no jealousy.

I believe those who hold this attitude are missing three things.

The first is what I learned from Bruce Wilkinson in his book *A Life God Rewards*.<sup>45</sup> He basically asks the question, "What do you want to do for someone who has so loved you and taken care of you?" The answer is serve them. Worship and praise will be great, but not enough. You'll want to do something for that person. You'll want to serve that person. For all of eternity we're going to want to serve Jesus.

Don't forget the book of Revelation where we see that this is what we were created for:

*You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth. (Revelation 5:10)*

Bruce believes (and I agree) that when we get to heaven, we will have an unquenchable desire to serve the One who served us so greatly. And the service opportunity that we have will be determined by how we live our lives on this earth. If we serve Him poorly here, because we're not worried about a kingdom, we'll serve Him poorly there, which is something we'll desperately desire to do with all our heart. It will be a let down, even with our old natures gone, to not serve Him as much as we could.

Secondly, even though we will be "full of joy," there are different capacities for that joy.

When I travel and speak on this topic, I take with me a three-inch balloon, a five-inch balloon and a ten-inch balloon. I ask

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<sup>45</sup> Page 62

three people from the audience to come and blow one of them up. When they finish, it becomes obvious that they are different sizes. But they all have one thing in common— they are all full.

If we served God poorly on this earth, we will still be full of joy, but I believe our capacity for that joy will not be as great as if we had served Him faithfully. God wants to reward us, not only with “things” in eternity, but with a full joy of great capacity.

Don't, I beg of you, don't think, “Hmm, a shack is okay with me.” Live for the fullest reward. Live for the best-case scenario. You won't want anything less when you get to heaven.

But we haven't gotten to the third reason. And that is a tear-jerker found in the next chapter.

## Chapter 13: Denied By Christ?

Is it possible that losing your personalized kingdom, not being a part of the bride, and not being invited to the banquet is not the worst scenario that could happen in heaven? Could it go one step further? Could it be that—though our sins have been forgiven—Jesus is ashamed of us for a period of time and denies us?

While Jesus was talking about the cost of being one of His disciples, we read these words:

*Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. <sup>36</sup> What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? <sup>37</sup> Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? <sup>38</sup> If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels." (Mark 8:34-38)*

If you disagree with the idea of losing a kingdom while still getting to enter heaven, you are forced to believe that verse 38 applies to non-believers and verse 34-37 belongs to believers. And it could be read that way. (I will be the first to say that some passages of Scripture are very difficult to understand.)

But the context could demand that everything Jesus is saying is applied to believers. As a result, Jesus could be ashamed of those who are not willing to be witnesses to others. As discussed earlier, losing their soul (or life) means losing a life with purpose and meaning, both here on the earth and in eternity.

If they are not willing to be a disciple but just want salvation alone, Jesus will be ashamed of them. In the shame, they will not be invited to the wedding banquet or possibly not become a part of the bride of Christ—or both. They will be denied that privilege

and lose a close eternal fellowship with Him.

## Will Jesus Really Deny Us?

There are four passages that support the idea of Jesus denying us to the Father on Judgment Day. Let's examine each one of them.

### #1: A Puzzling Passage

Paul references this concept of Christ denying us entrance into the wedding feast with a passage that I could never understand. We find it in 2 Timothy:

*Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him;<sup>12</sup> if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us;<sup>13</sup> if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself. (2 Timothy 2:11-13)*

This passage always seemed so contradictory. If we disown Him, how could He disown us and yet still be faithful to us? Now that I realize not all will be a part of the bride of Christ and make it to the wedding banquet, it makes complete sense. Let me walk you through it phrase by phrase.

*"If we died with him, we will also live with him."*

When Paul uses the idea of death with Christ (as in Romans 6:2), he is speaking in terms of being baptized in Christ. It means making a commitment to follow Christ. It means our name has been recorded in heaven. Christ has a personal relationship with us. We have taken the first step.

With that first step, we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit.<sup>46</sup> The Holy Spirit lives inside us permanently. He will never leave us nor forsake us.<sup>47</sup>

Paul then takes it to the next step—not merely having your name recorded in heaven, but being rewarded in heaven. He is referencing the best-case scenario.

*"If we endure, we will also reign with him."*

This speaks of a person who not only makes a commit-

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<sup>46</sup> Ephesians 4:30

<sup>47</sup> Hebrews 13:5

ment to Christ, but who endures to the end. They are mature. It speaks of “overcoming” as in Revelation 3:21 and being “victorious, doing God’s will to the end” as in Revelation 2:26. Those who lived the faithful life will be rewarded with the honor of ruling and reigning with Christ. That’s what this whole book is about and what verse 12 is referring to.

*“If we disown him, he will also disown us”*

This has always been the problem passage. This seems to clearly state that we can lose our salvation. But that is not the case at all.

Our disowning Him means we shrink back from standing up to him. We had an opportunity to make Him shine and didn’t take it. Outwardly we disowned Him. And if we do this, He will also disown us.

Yet Christ can disown us without us losing our salvation. His disowning us will mean He is breaking the engagement. He will look to His Father and say, “This one is not worthy to be a part of My bride or come to the banquet. This one is not worthy to sit with Me on My throne. They are not mature enough.” That is how He is going to disown us. It will be before the Father and result in losing the right to rule and reign with Him forever. We will not be rewarded with what God had tailor-made for us since the beginning of time.

2 Timothy continues:

*“If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.”*

This is where the passage really seemed to contradict itself. If we have no faith, why would He be faithful to us? It only makes sense if you differentiate between being recorded in heaven and being rewarded in heaven.

These words are written to ensure us that—even though the engagement is off and we will not be ruling and reigning with Him—we will enter the kingdom of heaven because we have been sealed with His Holy Spirit. He cannot deny His Spirit living inside of us. He will not leave us nor forsake us. Our “faithlessness” is living a life that doesn’t endure to the end. We were not overcomers. Our maturity did not blossom. We did not live life in the power of the Holy Spirit. But because His Spirit lives inside of us, we are still going to be in heaven—with Him forever.

Being denied by Christ does not mean we don't go to heaven. Just as a child on earth might lose their earthly inheritance from their parents but they don't lose their last name. Their last name will always be the same—no matter what. This is what it will be like on Judgment Day. It was never a question about whether we are saved. We will have the "same last name" because the Holy Spirit lives in us. It will be a question about whether or not we will rule and reign with Him. Our names are recorded, but will we be rewarded? He may not respect the life we lived—but we will be saved.

## #2: I Will Disown Him

The second passage comes from the lecture Jesus gives to His disciples as He's about to send them out on their first witnessing trip. He's talking to His twelve disciples right before they go out, and in the midst of Jesus' words, we read this:

*Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.<sup>33</sup> But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven. (Matthew 10:32,33)*

Could this simply be a teaching Jesus is giving to His disciples to tell other non-believers? Is He saying, if you find people who deny Me, tell them I'll deny them and they won't get to go to heaven? Yes, it could be.

But it could also be seen as Jesus emphasizing the best-case scenario. I'm sending you out like sheep among wolves. Don't be afraid. If you are afraid—and you deny Me out there while you are witnessing—I will disown you before My Father. You won't get to be a part of My bride because you won't be finishing strong. And I don't want that. I want you to get your kingdom—your full reward. Don't disown Me before others.

The context of the entire passage points us in this direction. Look at the following verses:

*Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.<sup>35</sup> For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her*

*mother-in-law—<sup>36</sup> a man's enemies will be the members of his own household. (Matthew 10:34-36)*

Jesus is talking about how hard it is going to be. In other words, it will be so hard, they're going to be tempted to deny Christ. Jesus is saying don't do it. If you do, I'll deny you before God my Father and then you won't rule and reign with Me as a part of My bride.

The rest of the text makes the case even stronger. Why? Because Jesus goes on and talks about rewards—what they will get if they do testify about Him before others.

*Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. <sup>38</sup> Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. <sup>39</sup> Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. <sup>40</sup> Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. <sup>41</sup> Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. <sup>42</sup> And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward. (Matthew 10:37-42)*

Though it could easily be taken both ways, I want to challenge you that Jesus (in verse 32 and 33) is talking directly to His disciples. He is telling them, if you deny Me, I'll deny you before My Father. If you don't deny Me, any and every thing you do will be rewarded.

### **#3: Blotted Out**

The third passage that points us to this same conclusion is found in the book of Revelation. It is in that context that I believe we can understand the vision from John who wrote:

*The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from*

*the Book of Life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. (Revelation 3:5 ESV)*

There are three key concepts here: the Book of Life, the name of the person, and “blotted out.” Let’s start with the Book of Life.

I was always taught that the Book of Life referred to a list of names of people who were going to get to enter heaven.<sup>48</sup> In the text, their names will never be blotted out. But that implies something very big. Other names can be blotted out. In other words, you can lose your salvation.

Joseph Dillow writes, “In ancient Israel the Book of Life was the legal register of citizens, not a list of those who would go to heaven when they die. To ‘erase his name’ mean either (1) physical death (Deuteronomy 29:20) or (2) removal of the memory of a person (Exodus 17:14; Deuteronomy 25:19). It never referred to the loss of salvation.”<sup>49</sup>

Now the word “name” could have a couple of meanings. It could actually represent the person or it could represent the reputation of that person. You see this when someone says, “She has really made a name for herself.” This means that person has established a reputation for herself in whatever she is endeavoring to do.

The Greek work for name is *onoma*. It is used in the same chapter (chapter 3 of Revelation), but it is translated differently there:

*To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation (*onoma*) of being alive, but you are dead. (Revelation 3:1)*

There, the word is translated “reputation.” Since John used it in verse one to mean reputation, you would think John is using it in the same meaning four verses later. So instead of your name being blotted out, now it could be referring to your reputation being blotted out.

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<sup>48</sup> Daniel 12:1, Revelation 13:8, 17:8, 21:27

<sup>49</sup> *Final Destiny*, pages 672, 673



So then what does it mean to have your reputation blotted out of the Book of Life?

To understand this concept, you've got to think "big picture." Remember, God already has a best-case scenario prepared for each one of us. Before time began, our personalized kingdom was thought up and prepared for us. It was based on good works prepared in advance for us to do.<sup>50</sup> This is what Paul is writing about in Ephesians:

*For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)*

I'm guessing that since God prepared them in advance, those good works have already been written down. Where? I'm guessing our reputation has already been written in the Book of Life since the beginning of time.<sup>51</sup>

I know it is hard to wrap your mind around, but before God put the first electron together, God already had a plan for your life. He already knows what He wants you to do in this life. And it was already written down (I'm assuming) in the Book of Life. Therefore the Book of Life speaks of the life you were supposed to live, the Book of Remembrance speak of the life you actually lived.

## **Ink Vs. Pencil**

But here is the key. Our names have been written in ink, but our reputation (the works God has for us to do) has been written in pencil. Why pencil? Because, if we choose to look to God for guidance and for a life full of meaning and purpose, God will show that life to us. We will live it out. We will have the life He planned for us since the beginning of time—a life written in pencil.

Because of that life, we will have established a reputation throughout eternity based on a life of good works. In our eyes, the Apostle Paul has a strong reputation based on his life. So too, each life God wants us to live will establish a reputation for us as well. If we live that life, those pencil marks will be rewritten in

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<sup>50</sup> Ephesians 2:10

<sup>51</sup> Revelation 13:8, 17:8

ink forever and we'll have a solid reputation for all eternity, the reputation God wanted us to have.

But if we choose to go our own way and don't look to Him for guidance, the life that God wanted us to live won't become a reality. And God will not reward us the way He wanted to. As a result, the reputation He wanted us to have will not become a reality. Therefore, it will have to be erased out of the Book of Life. We will not be acknowledged by Jesus before God the Father as being worthy to be a part of His bride.

Does that mean we are going to hell? No. Our names are written in ink. That can never be erased. We won't get our inheritance, and we won't be acknowledged before God the Father like those who finished strong (Revelation 3:5). But we'll still have our "last name"—the Holy Spirit living inside of us. Christ won't deny Him inside of us. We will get to heaven. We will know God the Father's unconditional love. But, we will not rule and reign with Him as a part of His bride. We will not be invited to be a part of the bride of Christ.

#### **#4: The Foolish Virgins**

The five foolish virgins is our fourth passage. They lost the right to be at the wedding banquet and are also denied by Christ. The text is below:

*At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup> Five of them were foolish and five were wise. <sup>3</sup> The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. <sup>4</sup> The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. <sup>5</sup> The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. <sup>6</sup> At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' <sup>7</sup> "Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup> The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' <sup>9</sup> 'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' <sup>10</sup> But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to*

*the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. <sup>11</sup> Later the others also came. 'Lord, Lord,' they said, 'open the door for us!' <sup>12</sup> But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I don't know you.' <sup>13</sup> Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour. (Matthew 25:1-13)*

I would bet that your pastor might tell you that the five foolish virgins never made it to heaven. They ended up in hell because Jesus said to them, "I don't know you." But I want to challenge that traditional interpretation for multiple reasons.

First, they were virgins. Did this mean they knew no one sexually? It could, but in other parts of Scripture, we can find that it means they were pure and holy. This was Paul's goal in preaching to the Corinthians.

*I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. (2 Corinthians 11:2)*

If this is what it means, then all ten virgins are "in the kingdom." They will be saved. They will enter the kingdom of God. Their names are recorded. (By the way, if the foolish virgins were not believers, it would be an unsuitable analogy for an unrepentant sinner.)

Now, note that they took lamps with them. This means that they had faith that Jesus (the bridegroom) was coming. By faith they went out to meet Him. They lived a life honoring to God. They had their lamps with them, which gave off light. As a result, it is safe to say that they were, for a period of time, a light on a hill (Matthew 5:14)—which is what all believers are called to be. More evidence that they were believers.

Though they were prepared for Jesus' coming, they had no idea how long it would actually take. And as a result, they ran out of oil. When the bridegroom came, they realized they were out. They begged the other virgins for oil, but the prepared virgins wouldn't give it to them. (It is impossible for another's good deeds to be counted on your behalf. You have to earn your own rewards.)

What were they told? They were told to go and buy some oil.

Now, if they were not believers, they were being told to buy salvation, which goes against Scripture. Salvation cannot be bought. John says it is free in the book of Revelation:

*The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life. (Revelation 22:11)*

So what are they buying? What do they need that is going to cost them something?

They are being challenged to pick up their crosses and follow Christ, which costs everything. They are being challenged to live lives of discipleship and be faithful to the end. If they had done this, Christ would not be ashamed of them. Unfortunately, however, their time had run out.

## **I Don't Know You**

They were not allowed into the wedding feast. They had not finished strong. They were told, "I do not know you."

Again, the Scriptures can be very hard to interpret and here is another verse that is tricky. The difficulty is found in the fact that there are two words for "know" in the Greek.

The first is *epiginosko*. It refers to intimate experiential knowledge. It is used of sexual intercourse. You'll find Christ using it in Matthew 7:23:

*Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup> Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew (epiginosko) you. Away from me, you evildoers!' (Matthew 7:21-23)*

In referencing evildoers, Christ is saying He doesn't know them intimately. He did not have a relationship with them. They are not His descendants. They are unsaved—even though they did works in His name. It seems as if they were trying to get to

heaven by their works—which no person can do.

But there is another Greek word for the one English word “knowing” and it is *eido*. Its definition is different. It can be defined as:

- paying attention to,
- inspecting,
- examining,
- respecting or
- appreciate.

Paul uses *eido* as he writes to the Thessalonians:

*We ask you, brothers, to respect (eido) those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, (1 Thessalonians 5:12 ESV)*

Here it is translated “respect.” This is another meaning of the second Greek word for “knowing.”

By using this verb *eido* instead of *epiginosko* to the foolish virgins, Jesus is implying, “*I do have a relationship with you, but I did not respect or appreciate your life. You did not finish strong. You are not mature enough. You got choked out half way through your life. As a result, you do not get to become a part of my bride or join in the wedding banquet. It is only for family. You have to stay outside.*”

Jesus denied them entrance into the wedding banquet. They will not go in and possibly not be a part of the bride of Christ. Only family<sup>52</sup> get invited to the wedding party.

## How Long?

How long is this rebuke going to last? How long will there be crying in heaven?

Though the Scriptures do not give a definitive answer, one could assume it will last for as long as the wedding banquet takes place. At that point, Jesus will come out, married to His bride, and wipe away every tear:

*He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be*

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<sup>52</sup> Matthew 12:48-50

*no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. (Revelation 21:4)*

Will this period of intense rebuke be like a hell in heaven? I think not. Why? Because God the Father will be there with them all the time. This is what Jesus had prayed for them in His prayer to His Father:

*Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me.<sup>26</sup> I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them. (John 17:25,26)*

While they are outside the wedding banquet in the “outer darkness,” I believe God the Father will be there comforting them. They will not be alone.

For an analogy, imagine a young, immature child being told that he can't go with his older siblings to a pool party. Why? Well, first off he can't swim and it would be dangerous to him. But secondly, it is for older, mature teenagers. He would be a nuisance to those at the pool party, always wanting the attention to be completely on him.

As the parents see their youngest child crying, what are they going to do? They are going to pick him up and hold him. Will the child still be crying? For a period of time, yes, but he is secure in his parents' arms.

I believe that a parent holding a crying child is an accurate analogy of what these immature believers will experience with their heavenly Father. They will be crying. They will have lost their kingdom. There will be tears. But they will be secure in the love of God the Father.

But remember the good news! Once the wedding party is over, Jesus will come out and “wipe away every tear.” He will take away their shame. They will be filled with joy.<sup>53</sup>

## **Gut Check**

Now, some of you may be reading this and are wanting

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<sup>53</sup> Psalm 16:11

to scream, "Really? Tears in heaven? A public rebuke? Jesus denying us? Losing a kingdom? That sounds more like hell than heaven. If that's what it's like I'm not sure I want to go there."

How do we address this?

I believe Samuel Hoyt expressed it best when he penned these words:

**"To overdo the sorrow aspect of the judgment seat of Christ is to make heaven into hell. To underdo the sorry aspect is to make faithfulness inconsequential."<sup>54</sup>**

He is saying that there needs to be a balance of the grace of God and the justice of God. Don't deny either of them nor throw either out.

Think about that for a second. If you did throw out the justice of God, what would it be like? If everyone is rewarded equally in heaven (as I wrote in chapter 2), then why be faithful here on earth? Screw around. Cheat on your taxes. Cheat on your spouse. Steal what you can. Live a life where you earn all you can, to get all you can, and then sit on your can once you've got it.

In reality, what would be happening? You'll be just as selfish as non-believers and it will be very difficult for your life to shine. But you will be saved along with everyone else.

Jesus knew that thinking. But He wasn't going to throw out the justice of God. That's why He talked about the parables of the talents. We are to be found trustworthy. This life is a test for Eternity Future. If we are trustworthy here on earth, God will reward us with true riches:

*So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? (Luke 16:11)*

It seems that these true riches come to the bride of Christ and will be given at the wedding feast. If you lose your true riches (your personalized kingdom), they will be given to someone else and there will be sadness. This happens to the immature children. Jesus will break off the engagement with those who are

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<sup>54</sup> Hoyt, *Negative Aspects*, p 131.

*tekna* children. And there seems to be a very real possibility that He also breaks off the engagement with those who are rewarded with five cities—those who could have done better but didn't give it their all. They didn't hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

I'm not 100% sure I'd die for this, but I'm preparing for a worst-case scenario. I want to be a Nike™ Christian and finish strong for His glory and my good.

## **Grace and Justice Walk Hand-in-Hand**

To conclude this idea that some may not be a part of the bride and some may not be invited to the wedding banquet, I want to offer one more thought.

The grace of God and the justice of God walk hand-in-hand and never separate. Wherever the justice of God hands out a negative reward based on a life poorly lived ("You're not a part of the bride" or "You're not invited as a wedding guest"), the grace of God will always be there loving, caring and administering grace to the individual. God's grace never "takes a vacation" from any one at any point in time. They will not be devastated.

Heaven will not be hell for some people. Though there may be a rebuke in heaven for a limited period of time, the grace of God will always be there holding their hand—they will always be loved, they will always be cared for—even during their rebuke.

Will those who lose their rewards be jealous for all eternity? Will they look at the person who got their kingdom and want to shake their fist at them or at least be bitter towards them?

The answer is clearly no. Those are all symptoms of our old nature. And our old nature will be cut off from us. It will no longer have any opportunity to rule our lives. We will be free from it for all eternity. We know this from Revelation as it speaks about the context of heaven.

*Nothing impure will ever enter it. (Revelation 21:7)*

For all eternity, there will be no jealousy. There will be no unhappiness. There will be no bitterness. It will all be gone. He will make all things new!



## Chapter 14: But What About James?

When I first began to title this book, I sent out e-mails to those on my newsletter list<sup>55</sup> asking them to vote on possible titles for this book. Some of the titles they voted on were *Got Grace? Why Works?*, *Rich Saint*, *Poor Saint* and *Winning While Losing*. Along with the titles, I sent a paragraph explaining what the book was about.

More than once I received emails from people who gave me their vote, while at the same time writing, *“It really doesn’t matter, because James says that our faith will naturally produce works.”*

There are many people who hold this view. It is derived from the second chapter of James:

*What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? (James 2:14)*

*Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. <sup>19</sup> You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. <sup>20</sup> You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless (dead)? (James 2:18b-20)*

From their point of view, there will be no “breaking off of the engagement” or those who will be “denied by Christ.” This passage (and the whole book of James they will say) clearly cries out, “If you have faith, good works will naturally follow. It’s a no-brainer. Everyone is going to be rewarded. Everyone will be a part of the bride of Christ.”

Though they claim we have to have works, they are quick to say they are only saved by faith. But they’ll also say that faith that is true and genuine always results in good works. Martin

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<sup>55</sup> If you want on my e-mail newsletter list, please e-mail me at [1jealousGod@gmail.com](mailto:1jealousGod@gmail.com) and write, “Put me on your e-mail newsletter list.”

Luther scratched his head many a time trying to figure out the book of James and finally put it this way: “We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.”

Though this text, and the book of James, seem to support this idea that faith is never alone, there are other texts in the very same chapter that point to the idea while simultaneously contradicting Paul’s theology in other parts of the Bible. One is found in the 24th verse:

*You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. (James 2:24)*

But Paul’s letter to the Romans contradicts this:

*For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. (Romans 3:28)*

James says it is not by faith alone—but faith accompanied by works. Paul says it is solely by faith—apart from works. Who is right—Paul or James?

## **New Meanings To Old Words**

Many years ago when I was coaching my son in basketball, he made a unique comment that threw me off. He said, “That was a sick shot.” I told him that I thought it was an excellent shot. He agreed. “Ya dad, I know—a sick shot.” All of a sudden I began to realize that his generation was taking the word sick and giving it new meaning. Now it meant great. (I learned this again when I heard “bad” being used to mean “great.”)

Sometimes two people can use the same word and it can have two totally different meanings.

I believe this is what was happening between Paul and James. They use the words faith and saved in two different ways. As a result, we readers get very confused.

Each of us has an understanding of what we believe “faith” and “works” to mean. As a result, we have theological assumptions. For most of us, those assumptions get us into trouble when we attempt to reconcile James’ words with Paul’s words.

The first assumption is found in the fact that when James

speaks of faith, he is speaking about a saving faith. It is this type of faith that will keep you out of hell.

The second assumption they make is that the word saved is always referencing being saved from hell. There is no other salvation that could be referred to. Hence any time James talks about being saved, it is referencing the difference between heaven and hell.

If those assumptions get challenged and there are other meanings for those two words, the book of James can take on an entirely new meaning. The question is, can they be challenged?

## Faith

Does faith always refer to a saving faith in the Scriptures? No, it absolutely doesn't. Let's look at a few passages that mention faith without referencing being saved from hell.

Our first passage is found in Paul's letter to Timothy:

*But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. <sup>12</sup> Fight the good fight of the faith. (1 Timothy 6:11,12)*

In the context of this passage, Paul is telling Timothy that people get ruined because of the love of money and because of false teaching. He is trying to warn Timothy to not go down that route. As a result, he says to Timothy, "Flee all of this and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness."

He then makes the analogy that doing this is like fighting a good fight. But the fight, he says, is a fight of faith. It is this faith that will keep him walking strong in the Christian life, not allowing him to falter due to false teaching or the love of money.

The faith that Paul is referencing here has nothing to do with eternal salvation; it has everything to do with walking strongly with the Lord. He wants Timothy to be a mature believer and not end up immature, as he surely saw many a believer become. He wants Timothy to walk in the Spirit, not the flesh.

Our second passage is found in Paul's letter to the Corinthians:

*For we live by faith, not by sight. (2 Corinthians 5:7)*

In this context, Paul is talking about waiting for a new body that will come when we go to be with the Lord. So he is obviously speaking to believers who are going to heaven. To those believers, he is saying that we live by faith. This living by faith, Paul says in the previous verse, is “...that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.” This means the faith he is referencing is living a holy and godly life while here in our earthly bodies still on this planet. Again, since he is writing directly to believers who are waiting to get new bodies in heaven, it has nothing to do with getting to heaven. It was a foregone conclusion that they were already saved in that sense.

Paul says the same thing to the Galatians:

*Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because “the righteous will live by faith.” (Galatians 3:11)*

*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. (Galatians 5:6)*

Looking at the entire context of this second passage helps you see so clearly that “faith expressing itself through love” has nothing to do with getting to heaven. The entire book is about not having to be bound to a set of rules putting them back under the law. Paul is speaking about being free by faith to walk in holiness, not in the ways of the flesh. Look at what he says next in verse 7:

*You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? (Galatians 5:7)*

The race he is speaking about is living life without having to “keep the rules.” They were running a good race. They did love others by faith (verse 6). Yet there were those who were claiming that they still needed to be circumcised, that they needed to be back under a set of rules. Paul wasn’t happy about this. He was afraid his church planting effort was faltering because of a believer in their church with some bad theology.

After encouraging them to get rid of this person (versus 8-12), Paul exhorts them in the same chapter on how to use their freedom. It shouldn't be used to gratify the desires of the flesh, but to serve others in love:

*You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. <sup>14</sup> For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>15</sup> If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. <sup>16</sup> So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. (Galatians 5:13-16)*

Note here that he is writing to believers: brothers and sisters. Then he challenges them to "serve one another humbly in love." This means living a life of love. It is a lifestyle of "faith"—the kind of faith Paul wants them to have. (He is not referring to a saving faith, which is a one time act of trusting in Christ, but rather an ongoing faith to live a life of love.)

According to these texts and more, there are two different kinds of faith. There is a saving faith, and then there is a *sanctifying faith, which allows us to live a godly life*. Both are needed to live the life God wants us to live. One gets you into heaven. One keeps you walking firmly in the power of the Holy Spirit resulting in rewards in heaven.

Since there are two different types of faith referenced in God's Word, are there also two different types of salvation?

## Saved

When we see the word saved in the Bible, we assume it means being saved from hell. But is our assumption correct? Many times it is, but many more times it is not.

When "saved" or "salvation" (in their various forms) was used in the Old Testament, it never dealt with going to heaven versus hell. Remember, the Jews were not worried about going to hell. They were the chosen ones. Their use of saved or salvation dealt with a variety of "savings" such as:

- saved in battle,<sup>56</sup>
- saved from other nations,<sup>57</sup>
- gaining prosperity,<sup>58</sup>
- saved from evil in general—even plagues or famine.<sup>59</sup>

This would be the context in which the Jews of Jesus' day would understand this word.

But does “save,” “saved” or “salvation” in the New Testament refer to being delivered from eternal damnation? Absolutely yes. But we can't rest in that alone. We have to ask, do all of these refer to being saved from hell or just some of them? And that answer is only some of them.

The Greek word for saved is *sōzō*. There are many texts that can be found where this Greek word (in its various forms) has nothing to do with being saved from hell. It has obvious other meanings brought over from their Old Testament usage.

In Matthew 9, a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years touched Jesus' cloak and was healed. The word for healed is the same Greek word we use for being saved (*sōzō*):

*Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. <sup>21</sup> She said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.” <sup>22</sup> Jesus turned and saw her. “Take heart, daughter,” he said, “your faith has healed (*sōzō*) you.” (Matthew 9:20-22)*

In fact, 19 percent of the time *sōzō* is used, it is in reference to physical healing.<sup>60</sup> It can also be used in a similar way to the Old Testament when it speaks about being delivered (*sōzō*) from impending danger. We see this in Jesus' prayer:

*“Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save (*sōzō*) me from this hour’? (John 12:27a)*

Obviously Jesus wasn't worried about going to hell. He was

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<sup>56</sup> Psalm 33:16

<sup>57</sup> Judges 13:5

<sup>58</sup> 2 Samuel 23:5

<sup>59</sup> Chronicles 20:9, 6:28-30

<sup>60</sup> *Final Destiny*, Joseph Dillow, Page 151

worried about physically enduring the cross. He knew it was going to be extremely hard. He was asking His Father if there was any way their goals could be accomplished without having to go through the cross.

Paul uses the same Greek word about himself while in jail. He certainly wasn't referencing hell and he wasn't even asking to get out of jail. He was asking to remain strong in jail. He wanted to keep getting the message out with lots of courage—without being ashamed!

*Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. <sup>13</sup> As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. <sup>14</sup> And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear. ...<sup>19</sup> for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance (sōzō). <sup>20</sup> I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. <sup>21</sup> For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. (Philippians 1:12-14,19-21)*

Another usage of the Greek word showing it doesn't mean eternal salvation is found in Timothy:

*But women will be saved (sōzō) through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety. (1 Timothy 2:15)*

This obviously isn't referencing salvation from eternal hell—or else it is one of the most creative ways to get to heaven which is not only works oriented and can only be done by females! Well that can't be.

So what is it referencing? It is referencing having a life of purpose.

Paul needed to address this because he had just excluded women from positions of teaching authority in the church (1

Timothy 2:9-14). So he's now helping them to see what is left for them in playing a significant role. That role is to live a full and rich life through their role of mothering children. He doesn't want them to feel left out. He is saying they play a very important role through motherhood. As William Ross Wallace penned in a poem, "She who rocks the cradle rules the world." That's a ton of significance.

This same idea of salvation is seen in Paul's exhortation to Timothy:

*Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. <sup>16</sup> Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save (sōzō) both yourself and your hearers. (1 Timothy 4:15,16)*

If "save" means "deliverance from hell," then Paul's exhortation to Timothy to be careful of going to hell is contradictory. Paul's letter to the Ephesians indicates that we are saved, as he puts it in past tense.<sup>61</sup> Timothy was a disciple of Paul and clearly a believer.

But if "save" means living a full and productive life that honors God, the exhortation makes perfect sense. Yes, Timothy needs to watch his life and doctrine closely to live a life that honors and glorifies God.

On average, Joseph Dillow says that "save," "saved" or "salvation" used in the New Testament refers to deliverance from hell only 37% of the time. The rest of the time (63%) it has other meanings.

## **New Meaning**

So let's see how James' text can look with the other two possible meanings for faith and saved:

*What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? (James 2:14)*

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<sup>61</sup> Ephesians 2:6,7



*Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. <sup>19</sup> You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. <sup>20</sup> You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless (dead)? (James 2:18b-20)*

What James could be writing is this:

*What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have a godly life (faith) but has no deeds? Can a life without works give them a full and meaningful life (save them)?*

*Show me your godly life (faith) without deeds, and I will show you my godly life (faith) by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. You foolish person, do you want evidence that living a godly life (faith) without deeds will yield no rewards (is useless)?*

If this is a correct translation, what James was refuting was the fact that there were people in the church who were saying, “We don’t have to live a life of good works to be rewarded fully. We’re saved. We’ll have the abundant life (maturity) here on earth and in eternity with or without doing good deeds and loving others. We’re just going to worry about ourselves surviving this persecution and not worry about others.”

This is the very attitude James was trying to fight against.

## Other Evidence

Is there any other evidence that would back up this argument? Yes! In fact, James is full of evidence supporting this alternative definition of the words faith and saved. And it begins in the first few verses of James:

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,<sup>3</sup> because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. <sup>4</sup> Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:2-4)*

There was persecution going on while James was writing his epistle. It seems as if some of the believers were thinking of

giving up. They were thinking, "Forget about taking a stand for Christ. Let's follow him quietly. This persecution is too much to take."

James was crying out, "*No, don't do that! Don't you realize that these are tests from God? He wants to test your faith—not your saving faith—but a faith of living a godly, holy life in the midst of persecution. If you do this, you will have perseverance. And if you persevere, you will be mature and complete. And on top of it all, you'll be fully rewarded.*" His cry was for them to be mature believers.

He then continued even more and gives us new meaning to what "saved" can actually be. Look at verse 12:

*Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.*  
(James 1:12)

James is saying, "*If you persevere, please know that you are going to receive a crown in heaven. God is going to richly reward you! Don't wimp out these 80 or so years on earth by living quietly for Christ to escape persecution and then lose out eternally. Stay strong. Hold fast under these trials and you will be richly rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ. This is what it means to be saved.*"

He later goes on to speak of death:

*Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.*  
(James 1:15)

Could the result of sin—death—refer to going to hell? Yes, it could, but it would contradict a lot of other texts in God's Word. Why? Because James is writing to brothers and sisters (verse 16) and that would mean he is advocating that they could lose their salvation—which contradicts Paul.

Is there any other use of the Greek word death (*nekros*) that could support the idea that death doesn't have to refer to hell?

Yes! In Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, He uses the same word *nekros* when the father spoke of his son.

*For this son of mine was dead (nekros) and is alive again. (Luke 15:24a)*

What was the father in the parable talking about? He was referencing the fact that the son once had a close relationship to his father, but he ended up feeding pigs and living a miserable life away from fellowship with his father. The “death” of his son was not going to hell, but rather living a miserable life separated from fellowship with his father and not getting rewarded.

If we apply that meaning to this text, it provides a consistent theme in the book. James is saying, *“Don’t give in to the temptation to live quietly for Christ. You’ll eventually yield to the flesh and give in to sin. If you do, you are going to die. Not a physical death—nor an eternal death—but rather a death that will result in broken fellowship with God and not being rewarded for all eternity. Just like the prodigal son’s fellowship with God was broken when he went away from his father’s presence, so too will yours be broken as well. You don’t want that. Stand firm in your faith.”*

James’ theme of living a mature life is upheld by verse 20 and 21:

*My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,<sup>20</sup> because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. (James 1:20,21)*

To see the consistency in the book of James, there are three key points. First, he is writing to brothers and sisters—believers! The word of God is “implanted in them”—again, strong signs that they are believers.

Secondly, James is communicating that the goal of life is to produce righteousness. This is what pleases God. If they do this, they will not be angry and live an ungodly life. They won’t be quiet about their faith and they won’t live a life that gratifies the desires of the flesh.

He then concludes by admonishing them to get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent. In today’s termi-

nology he is saying, "Get rid of pornography. Stop cheating and stealing and doing what the non-believers of this world do."

What is the result if they get rid of these things? They will be saved. Saved as in not going to hell? No, they are already believers. Saved as in living a full and meaningful life and being richly rewarded by God in eternity. In simple terms James is saying, "*You will live a godly life by accepting God's Word in you and acting on it. Then you will be pleasing to God and be richly rewarded.*"

How many people have you and I seen that claim to be Christians but are living hellish lives? They want to live for Christ and are truly trusting Him to save them, but they're addicted to pornography or they're addicted to control or alcohol and are dysfunctional as a believer. I've seen tons and I'm sure you know others as well. This is what James is referring to in his letter.

## Action Oriented

In the book of James, there are lots of things for them to do. James wants the believers to be action oriented:

*Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry (James 1:19)*

*...get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent (James 1:21)*

*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. (James 1:22)*

*They will be blessed in what they do. (James 1:25)*

*My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. (James 2:1)*

*With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. <sup>10</sup> Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.*

If I'm Saved By Grace, Why Bother With Works?

*(James 3:9,10)*

*Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. (James 4:8)*

*Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. (James 4:11)*

*If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them. (James 4:17)*

*You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. <sup>9</sup> Don't grumble against one another (James 5:8,9)*

By now you should be realizing, "Hmm, action oriented. That sounds like works. He must be speaking of rewards." And if you were thinking that way, bingo! You've got it right! How do we know? Because James speaks about rewards and Judgment Day! It is woven into the entire book of James!

*Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. (James 1:12)*

*Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom (James 2:12)*

*Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. (James 3:1)*

*There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. (James 4:12)*

*Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door! (James 5:9)*

For the typical evangelical Christian, these verses point to one thing: if you don't live up to these works, you need to question your salvation. Ouch. What pressure would exist to live the Christian life. That burden is not easy nor the yoke light as Jesus says in Matthew 11:30.

## Friend of God

To help drive this point home even further, James talks about Abraham being a "friend of God."

*You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? <sup>21</sup> Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. <sup>23</sup> And the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. <sup>24</sup> You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. (James 2:20-24)*

Again, if we assume that James is using the words faith and saved not in an eternal sense, he is starting off his argument this way: "You foolish person who thinks you can live a godly life and be rewarded eternally without good works, let me prove to you that a godly life can't be attained by just trusting in Jesus to be your Savior but not doing any good works." He then goes on and talks about Abraham.

Now, at first reading, it seems like James was contradicting his own argument by saying that it was Abraham's faith and deeds (offering his son Isaac) that "saved him" or made him "righteous." But this is not the case. We know this because of two key things.

First, any student of the Old Testament knows that Abraham was considered righteous by faith alone. This is clearly spelled out in Genesis chapter 15:

*And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness. (Genesis 15:6)*

This righteousness that Abraham received happened 30 years before Abraham offered his son Isaac on the altar. So just as “saved” can mean “saved eternally” or “saved by having a full and meaningful life,” James seems to argue that “righteous” can have two meanings as well.

The first righteousness is a righteousness that comes when we stand before God blameless on Judgment Day. The second righteousness is a righteousness that is given to us as we seek to live a godly and holy life here on this earth. If we do that we are being mature and will be richly rewarded.

This helps us now to see the difference between *having* to do and *getting* to do good deeds. The typical evangelical belief says you “have to do” good works to show you are a true believer. If you’re not doing those good works, you’re probably not a true believer.

But if our understanding of James’ message is correct, we don’t *have* to do good works to prove our Christianity; we *get* to do these works, to love and glorify God and earn rewards. No longer is it forced. It is a joy!

We see this “second righteousness” backed up by the fact that Abraham’s faith was made “complete” (verse 22) when he offered up Isaac. Complete means mature. This is why Abraham was called a friend of God. From the mouth of Jesus, we know that being a friend of God means one who is obeying God—and that’s exactly what Abraham did.

This second type of righteousness can be seen in other passages too. Jesus referenced it when speaking about rewards:

*Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. (Matthew 6:1)*

If this refers to the first type of righteousness, being seen as holy in God’s eyes, how could you “practice it”? You couldn’t. Jesus is referring to the second type of righteousness, meaning living a life (action) dedicated to God.

Luke used the same Greek word for righteous in referencing action:

*...but accepts from every nation the one who fears him*

*and does what is right. (Acts 10:35)*

James understood these two types of righteousness. One that has us before God without blame, and one that lives a godly life while here on this earth—full of purpose and meaning, earning a great reward. One gets us to heaven. One gets us rewarded in heaven.

Along with this, please note what is implied in verse 22 when James speaks of Abraham having a “faith made complete.” James is saying that you can have an “incomplete faith.” You can be immature. (We saw this in chapter 5.) And that is exactly what James is hoping will not happen in their lives—and the whole purpose of the letter. He doesn’t want them to be believers who are trusting Jesus to save them eternally but are not living for Christ and are therefore having a totally dysfunctional life—living out the desires of the flesh.

## **Further Proof**

Is there any other evidence that could help us see beyond a shadow of a doubt that James is talking about living a full and meaningful life rather than going to hell? Yes, in fact.

Remember we saw in chapter 1 verse 12 that those who live this kind of life will “receive the crown of life.” He keeps that same theme going in chapter 2 right after speaking about not showing favoritism:

*Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? (James 2:5)*

Two things need to be highlighted. The first is inheriting the kingdom. Now that you are aware of the difference, James is clearly referencing gaining our full inheritance. In order to gain that full inheritance, we have to be “rich in faith.” Not a saving faith, but a faith that lives a life full of good works. The type of faith that James is referring to will yield the kingdom God promised you from the beginning of time.

Secondly, it is promised to those who “love him.” James was certainly referencing his half-brother, Jesus, who said, “If you



love me, keep my commandments.”<sup>62</sup> That type of faith is a faith which results in obedience.

## Concluding Remarks

If we understand James to be challenging believers to live a passionate life for Christ full of purpose and meaning, then we can see James' concluding remarks in a new way:

*My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back,<sup>20</sup> remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins. (James 5:19,20)*

What James is saying is this: “Listen, when one of you people in the church falls away and gets back into living a life focused on the flesh, and then one of you also in the church gets them to repent, you have done a great thing! You have saved them from living a useless, purposeless life—separated from fellowship with God. You will also save them from a life that will not be rewarded. And you will keep them from living life in the power of the flesh that will be full of sin. You'll cover a multitude of sins.”

## Conclusion

For many people, James has been a book that has basically told them, “You've got to show a life of good works in order to be truly saved eternally. If you don't have a life of good works, you aren't saved.” Though they won't say it is “faith plus works,” they are saying “true faith shows works.”

They believe this because they've never put together the idea that *faith*, *saved* and *righteous* can have different meanings. But because I have learned these different meanings, I can see a totally different message in James.

Because of what I see in the Scriptures and am learning from others, I am challenging the traditionally-held view.

I believe what James is saying is this: *“You are being tested in your faith. The goal of this testing is for you to live a life full of purpose and meaning that will glorify God. If you do this, you will*

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<sup>62</sup> John 14:15, 21, John 15:10, John 21:15-17,

*be richly rewarded and inherit the kingdom God has planned for you. If you don't, you will be gratifying the desires of your flesh and you will experience death. Not an eternal death away from God, but rather a death that means your fellowship with God is broken. You'll live a dysfunctional Christian life, and you won't be rewarded eternally, though you'll be saved. Don't shrink back into that life."*

Men and women, you can't live life in a self-centered way and expect to be fully rewarded. You are not entitled to the rewards. It doesn't work that way. You may be "in"—you are guaranteed to get to heaven—but you are at "ground zero" with respect to rewards. Your life will have to show good works to gain that full reward. Trusting in Jesus for salvation from hell is one type of faith. Trusting Jesus to give you the power to live the Christian life is a totally different type of faith. That is one that is rewarded.

The Old Testament helps us see believers like this in a simple way by referencing kings who followed after God differently. Note the differences below:

*Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the LORD as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses. (2 Kings 23:25)*

*Amaziah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years. His mother's name was Jehoaddan; she was from Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, but not wholeheartedly. (2 Chronicles 25:1,2)*

You who are reading this book, realize that you can walk with God but not wholeheartedly. There is a whole spectrum of walking with God from zero rewards to gaining your full inheritance (10 cities). Another way to graph this idea looks like what is seen on the top of the next page.

## A Spectrum of Rewards For Believers



My desire in writing this book is that you be found on the right side of the above graph, not the middle nor the left. Fight the good fight of faith. Live for eternal rewards. Live to passionately glorify Him.

Yet I've given this talk quite a few times, and it always seems that some older believers come to me quite upset. They are not mad at the teaching. Their anger goes out in one of two directions.

The first anger is directed against the church. One man came to me very angry and said, "I've been taught by the church my entire life that it's about grace, grace, grace. I had no idea I could be earning rewards. I'm 73 now. Why wasn't I taught this before?"

There is a second anger that I've found in some of the older members of my audiences. I was recently giving this talk down in Houston, Texas, and one man said, "I've wasted 20 years of my life as a believer. What does that mean for me? Can I earn my full reward?"

How would you answer that question?

If you're reading this book and you're in that situation, there's only one answer I can give you. It is encouragement from the Apostle Paul who himself was wrestling with this very situation. (Remember, he wasted years, if not decades, following a dead religion and then persecuting Christians.) He writes:

*Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13,14)*

What had he not yet taken hold of? What was the prize he wanted? It was his full reward. He wanted to finish well and gain his full inheritance.

If you have wasted years, or even decades, of your life, forget about it. Forget what is behind. That's what Paul did. Start living for your eternal rewards right now in light of this new information you are being given.

In chapters seven and eight of my book *God's Bottom Line*, I teach the principle that God holds us accountable to what we know—not what we don't know.

You now know you are supposed to work for your eternal inheritance. In God's eyes, the clock is ticking. You are being held accountable for it like never before. Live like it. Do the kingdom. Visit those in prison. Feed the hungry. Give cups of cold water in Jesus' name. Invite strangers into your home. Clothe the naked. Look after those who are sick. Go on short term mission trips. Join a team and go overseas as a retired person. Live the kingdom.

I pray that you can still hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." But God alone is judge.

## Chapter 15: Are We Being Selfish?

When I sent those e-mails out to get votes on the titles, I got back a very interesting response from a good friend. He wrote these words:

*My motivation in serving God isn't to get the jumbo size heavenly reward. It's about using what God's given me, being a trustworthy steward who makes eternal friends and hears the words, "Well done thou good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your master." A heavenly kingdom, mansion, Lamborghini... are the icing on the cake, if He is pleased and my family and friends are there.*

*In my mind I imagined high school students beginning to think about how to rack up points in heaven, rather than being in love with God and having His love for others as their purpose and the driving force of their lives.*

He poses a good question: are we being selfish in seeking eternal rewards? "Why not just do it to glorify God?" say some. "In fact, are we not told that the love of Christ controls us (2 Corinthians 5:14), not the love of reward?"

These are good questions and need to be addressed. We're going to look at our answers in two ways. The first way will be biblically. The second way will be logically.

### **Biblically**

#### **No Rebuke**

The disciples of Jesus seemed to be very much aware that there would be great ones in the kingdom and those who were in lesser positions. Look at this passage where two disciples ask a request of Jesus:

*Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."<sup>36</sup> "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.<sup>37</sup> They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." (Mark 10:35-37)*

Now, how might the average Christian today respond to such a request? My guess is that it would probably go something like this: "How arrogant of you to want to be sitting next to Jesus. You are only thinking of yourself. Don't you know that you're supposed to die to yourself and live for God's glory? Get over it. It's not about you. Just serve Him and rest in the fellowship of knowing Christ personally."

But that's not how Jesus responds. What does He say?

*"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"<sup>39</sup> "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with,<sup>40</sup> but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared." (Mark 10:38-40)*

What's He basically saying?

*"You two are going to die a death similar to mine. But I'm not the one who hands out positions of authority. That's what My Father does and He is the one who has the answer to that question. I don't."*

Note *one very key thing* in that answer. Jesus didn't rebuke them for asking the question. He didn't give the typical answer I'm guessing we'd hear today. He didn't say, "You are so self-centered. You're only thinking of yourselves. You need to think about others first." What does that non-verbally communicate?

Even though those disciples thought they were referencing an earthly kingdom, we can apply the lesson to the heavenly kingdom. It's okay to seek great reward in heaven. Jesus is not upset with us for wanting that. In fact, He seems quite cool about it. Even when the disciples come back at Him again with the

same question, He still doesn't rebuke them:

*At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked:*

*“Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”  
(Matthew 18:1)*

He simply answers them by talking about being like a child:

*He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. <sup>3</sup> And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>5</sup> And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. (Matthew 18:2-5)*

He is saying, “If you want to be great, which I have no problem with, the first thing you have to do is get into the kingdom! You've got to enter it. That requires the faith of a little child. Then once you get in, keep acting like that little child, trusting in God the Father, and you'll be great in the kingdom of heaven.”

Again, Jesus didn't rebuke them for the question. He simply talks about children—referencing their character of being obedient and full of faith.

Jesus never rebuked anyone for wanting to be great.

## **Rewards Are Encouraged**

There are multiple passages where Jesus actually encourages the idea of seeking rewards:

*Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. <sup>13</sup> But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, <sup>14</sup> and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” (Luke 14:12-14)*

At the heart of this encouragement to His host is a motivation for being rewarded. He is basically saying, “Don’t work only for rewards that you will get on the earth. Work for rewards that will last eternally—ones that you will get after you die!”

Matthew Hale was one of the students who tested this material in the Areté homeschool class. When we were discussing this point, he said, “I don’t want the rewards now, I want them later!” That is a smart answer and a wonderful desire—remember what the Apostle Peter writes:

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. (1 Peter 1:3,4)*

Rewards we get here on earth are temporary—be it the praise of people or physical things. But the rewards that we get in heaven will last forever! (Yes, Matthew, I’d like them later too!)

Now, note one key thing: Jesus didn’t have to bring this up! He didn’t have to say anything to His host. He chose to say it. He chose to point not only His host but also you and me to earning rewards at the resurrection of the righteous.

Jesus not only seems to be aware of rewards, but He seems to encourage them. Remember, He wants the best-case scenario for you and me.

If gaining eternal rewards is a part of your motivation, there are two key elements going on that keep it from being selfish.

First, your rewards are going to come to you in eternity—that takes faith! And faith is what pleases God. Notice how the writer of Hebrews phrases it:

*And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)*

Faith in future rewards is what God wants from us. Why? Because believing that our God is good—and that He wants to reward us eternally—glorifies Him! It makes Him look absolutely



wonderful and amazing. It points to Him as the provider and us as the recipients of His goodness. This is the best-case scenario that Jesus taught. This is what He wants you and me to believe in and strive for.

Secondly, you are doing what all of creation was meant to do. You are pointing to God. Remember, everything is from Him and through Him and to Him.<sup>63</sup> Looking to God—even in rewards—is what you were designed to do.

Remember, Jesus commands us to seek those rewards:

*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.<sup>20</sup> But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.<sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21)*

Jesus knows that 99.9999...% of your existence happens after you die. You'll have a new body based on how you lived your life here on earth. You'll have a new job description. You'll have a kingdom to rule and reign over. And when Jesus encourages you to do something, He is encouraging you to do it with an eternal perspective. He has eternity in mind with every command. He is—eternally—for you.

So He commands you, "Don't live for such temporal rewards. They'll burn away and you'll have nothing left for eternity. If you do, you'll lose your kingdom and your place in My Father's government that He planned for you since the beginning of time. I don't want you to lose that. I want the best-case scenario for you. So I command you to live for eternity. I command you to store up treasures in heaven that will last forever! Live to get eternal rewards."

If you haven't owned it in your heart, Jesus is on your side in these commands. Everything He commands is for your good and His Father's glory.

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<sup>63</sup> Romans 11:36

## Four Strands

One person told me the story of a young man who was helping set up chairs at church. They noted that he was doing it with a bad attitude. When asked why he was helping out, he commented, "I'm doing this for the rewards."

Living only for eternal rewards doesn't cut it. If you are a teenager who is only trying to "rack up points in heaven" as my friend suggested, you've got the wrong idea. You've got to balance a desire for rewards with other Scriptures that are also designed to guide and direct our motivations. What are they?

Remember, Paul gives us two of the three other key passages that can chaperone our desire for rewards. The first is found in his letter to the Corinthians:

*So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)*

When we are living for our eternal rewards, we should also have the motivation of glorifying the Lord. That involves attitude! You can't be setting up chairs with a bad attitude. That doesn't glorify the Lord. It shows you weren't really doing it for God, you were doing it for yourself—which misses the whole point of what it means to die to self!

So we are to do it for rewards and do it to the glory of God. The second motivation is found in the same letter:

*Do everything in love. (1 Corinthians 16:14)*

Paul says to do everything to the glory of God—and now, do everything in love.

A third exhortation that chaperones our desire for motivations is found in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount:

*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:33)*

Jesus says simply, seek first the kingdom of God.

Now you might be thinking, "Hey wait a second, doesn't that contradict Jesus saying that we are to store up treasures for our-

selves in heaven?" The answer is no. As you seek the kingdom of God first, you are also storing up for yourselves treasure in heaven that will last forever. And as God gives you those treasures, He is getting to show off His grace forever. That means it is still about Him.

So here you have four motivations:

1. Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.
2. Do it for the glory of God.
3. Do it in love.
4. Do it for the kingdom of God.

If you do it only for the rewards—without thought of God's kingdom or His glory or in love (as my friend feared in the opening paragraph), you're living for eternity in a selfish way. You haven't died to yourself.

## Thinking Logically

There is another way of realizing that we aren't being selfish living for eternal rewards. We can apply logical thinking to the Scriptural principles we find in God's Word. If you think this is strange, don't. The term "trinity" is never found in the Scripture. The term trinity was the result of logical thinking by people long ago. Today we take that as solid doctrine. So let's do some more logical thinking about this and maybe make some more solid doctrine.

### Reason #1

It was Christmastime a few months before our first grandchild was born. Wanting to bless my son, Luke, and his wonderful wife, Hannah, I tried to think up the perfect gift. Watching the news one morning, I found it. I was going to create a blanket with pictures of Luke and Hannah when they were babies. My thinking was that they could put the blanket over their daughter and see if she looked more like Luke or Hannah.

Without giving them any hints, I asked Hannah for pictures of herself as a little baby. I certainly had plenty of Luke. After scanning them in, I sent them to the company that made the blankets. It finally arrived and as I looked it over, it was perfect. I

was so excited. But it was still about 3 weeks before we flew out to see them.

As the time got closer, my anticipation began to build. In fact, I couldn't wait to give them their gift. I wasn't at all worried about what I was going to get for Christmas. I was totally focused on what I was giving. When I realized how excited I was, I saw how it applied to God.

When God chooses to give us rewards, yes, we'll be excited about the rewards, but think about what He is getting! He is getting the joy of giving. I gave Luke and Hannah something small. God is going to lavish on us something great! I can't imagine how happy and joyful God will be when He gives us our rewards. Since everything is from Him, through Him, and to Him, I have to assume that our rewards are just as much for Him as they are for us. And the more He can give us, the more joy He is going to have!

In some ways, I'll bet He can't wait for Judgment Day! And He's cheering us on to earn more rewards just as much for His sake as for ours!

## **Reason #2**

We get joy when we bless the Father.

What child would be considered selfish if he did the dishes because he wanted to please his parents? What Christian will be seen as selfish if she is obeying God's Word wanting to please her heavenly Father?

Visiting with an elderly couple in order to bless them is never seen as being selfish. You doing it largely for their sake—but that brings you joy in the process!

To a large degree I believe this was the joy Jesus was seeing when the Scriptures tell us:

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, <sup>2</sup>fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorn-  
ing its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the*

*throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1,2)*

If your theology is people-centered, you would say that the joy of Jesus was found in His relationship with us. Though I'm sure that brings Him great joy, Romans 11:36 keeps telling us that everything is from Him, through Him, and to Him—not us. Our theology needs to be God-centered.

As a result, I believe Jesus knew His obedience would put a smile on His Father's face! It was the pleasure that He was going to bring His Father that brought Him great joy—even when He had to endure the cross.

We too obey, and therefore seek rewards, because we want to please the Father.

### **Reason #3**

The third logical thinking is very straightforward. This idea of rewards didn't come from Satan. Nor did it come from our old nature. Nor is it found in the heart of this corrupt world. Where do we find it?

It is found in God's Word. God thought this up. It is His idea, not ours. And since He is pure and holy, it must be good!

If a father says to his child, "Son, mow this lawn for me and I'll give you \$50," should the child be rebuked because he is motivated by the \$50? Not at all! It was the father who thought it up and it will please the father to give it to him. Just as our earthly fathers know what motivates us, so does our heavenly Father!

Let's be honest, rewards drive everything. You wouldn't work unless you knew you were going to be getting a salary. Salesmen wouldn't sell unless they got a percentage of the sale. Students wouldn't study unless they desired a good grade. Good managers motivate workers with incentives. Small business owners start businesses to generate income—a reward. People volunteer in the community because it makes them feel good—another type of reward. Kids are motivated to do chores because they get an allowance—or the reward of not being spanked!

Most of us won't do anything unless we are rewarded. Motivation by reward is not a part of the fall. This is a part of our DNA, put there by God. God put it in us because He knows it is healthy and it will help us, not only in this life, but in the life to come.

## Reason #4

Imagine for a minute that Judgment Day has brought you great reward. Your works were gold, silver, and precious stones. You get invited to the wedding party. Jesus grants you the right to be a co-heir with Him—for eternity! Forever you'll be sitting on a throne with Jesus ruling over a part of the universe. While sitting there, you'll be asking Him questions, laughing together, giving each other a high five when things go exactly as they are supposed to. You're there hours upon hours with Christ because you're a co-heir. Pretty cool, huh?

Now imagine having wasted your life. On Judgment Day, all of your works were burned up. You were not invited to the bridal party. Christ denied you to the Father. After the celebration, Christ came out and wiped away your tears. You are now full of joy. You have no jealousy of anyone on the throne with Jesus, but you're not there with him and you're sweeping the streets in the new earth. (You got a lower position in the administration of God.) You know Jesus. You know His unconditional love. He checks in on a regular basis letting you know how much He loves you, but the majority of His time He's off ruling the universe.

Now let's ask a simple question. Who do you think is going to be closer to Jesus?

I think you'd agree that the person sitting with Christ on His throne will have a closer, more intimate relationship with Him for all eternity. Will the street sweeper know Jesus? Absolutely yes. Will that person know Jesus' unconditional love? Yes. Will they be as close to Him as the other? I think not. They are not a part of His bride.

I know my wife a whole lot better than I know any other woman. So too will it be with Jesus and His bride. He'll know His bride a lot better than He will the others.

I believe that by being faithful to the end, you will have a closer, deeper, more intimate relationship with Christ.

"Hogwash," someone might want to say. "God loves us all unconditionally." Yes, but unconditional love does not necessarily equate to the same fellowship.

When I first heard this concept, I didn't want to believe it either. But as it was explained to me, it made sense. Kings (or presidents) usually have a close circle of people around them

that they know better. It is not only the reality of today, but it is the example given to us in the Bible.

David had three men with whom he was very close.<sup>64</sup> Then he had his 35 closest fighting men next to him.<sup>65</sup> Only invited guests were allowed to eat at his table.<sup>66</sup> Jesus had one disciple who seemed to be the closest to Him, John.<sup>67</sup> From there, he had two others who were very close, Peter and James,<sup>68</sup> and then the twelve as a whole. These twelve knew Jesus far better than the rest of the multitudes.

On this earth, it is common for kings and presidents to have a close circle of friends around them. So shall it be in heaven. Jesus—the King of Kings—will have those closer to Him. It is because of this, we read these words from Jesus:

*For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother. (Matthew 12:50)*

*You are my friends if you do what I command. (John 15:14)*

To be in the “inner circle” with Jesus—to have the best relationship with Him throughout eternity—we will need to be “doers” of the Word, not merely hearers. Those closest to Jesus for eternity will not be the ones who were hypocrites on this earth. Those closest to Him will be the ones who heard God’s Word and obeyed it.

## **Reason #5**

The fifth reason seeking rewards is not selfish is because each reward is a way of expressing thanks to Jesus for what He has done.

This is basically what the elders will be doing as seen in the book of Revelation. They are laying their “crowns” before Jesus:

*The twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits*

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<sup>64</sup> 2 Samuel 23:8

<sup>65</sup> 2 Samuel 23:8-39

<sup>66</sup> 2 Samuel 9:7-11

<sup>67</sup> John 13:23.

<sup>68</sup> Matthew 17:1

*on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:  
"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."  
(Revelation 4:10,11)*

What the elders are doing with these crowns is expressing their worship and gratitude. They are saying, "We don't deserve these crowns. Everything we did was done by the power of your Holy Spirit. You are so amazing and gracious. We want to give them back to you as a symbol of our thankfulness!"

These same crowns are also symbolic of the positions of authority we will have. In other words, "Lord, all that you have given me is more than I deserve. You're too amazing. As a way of saying thanks, I'm putting them back at your feet!"

The more we are given responsibility to rule and reign, the more we'll have to thank the Lord with. That is great motivation! By earning more rewards, we will have more to offer back to Christ in thanks.

But do note: Jesus doesn't take back the rewards. Though they are offered to Him, we are not told that He takes them. I would assume He would be saying, "Thanks, but I gave those to you. You earned them. Keep them!"

## **Reason #6**

When God gives us rewards, we won't be boasting and bragging about all of our good works. It will be this way for two reasons.

First, it was God who gave us power through the Holy Spirit to do all of the works in the first place:

*LORD, you establish peace for us; all that we have accomplished you have done for us. (Isaiah 26:12)*

Al Steiner, on my newsletter list, wrote the following:

There's an African folktale of a mouse riding through the bush on the back of an elephant. They come to a deep river gorge with a cable suspension bridge. As they cross, the bridge sways



back and forth with every footstep. Arriving on the other side of the river, the mouse trots out on the elephant's trunk, looks him in the eye, and says, "Wow! We shook that bridge." We have to remember when good is accomplished it's God working in and through us.

Without His Spirit inside of us, nothing would have happened in the first place. We would have remained wretched sinners.

Secondly, the rewards that we get will not be comparable to the work we did. Remember, He is a gracious God. When we get the rewards, we're going to be blown away and say, "Yeah, but God, I didn't do that much. I don't deserve to be rewarded like this...." Our actions reward us 10,000% interest!<sup>69</sup> That's above and beyond.

Here's the beautiful key. When we are rewarded, the focus will not be on us. It will be on Him due to His generosity. It's the rewarder who lavishes rewards on us that gets the glory, not the rewarded. Once again, it is not about us. Those who are rewarded simply get blown away by His grace.

## **Are All Kingdoms The Same?**

In my teaching on this material, I hear people say something like, "But I'm not a leader. My gift is in serving. What if I don't want to rule and reign? Will that make heaven a hell for me?"

The answer is no. When Jesus says we will sit with Him on His throne (Revelation 3:21), we assume that automatically means ruling and reigning. Although "throne" has the connotation of ruling and reigning, it has other connotations as well.

Those on thrones also have great responsibilities. And if we've learned anything from God the Father, those on the throne also serve others. This is how it works in God's kingdom.

Let me give you an analogy of how responsibility can be seen from the throne. If this world is Jesus' kingdom, under it you have kings (with a small "k") and presidents of nations. They, too, are reigning (though most of them not with Jesus) and have great responsibility. And in the United States, though there is one president, there are 50 governors who govern (rule) a state, also with great responsibility. And in those states are cities

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<sup>69</sup> Matthew 19:29

who have mayors. Mayors have chief of staff and other deputy mayors—each with specialized authority and responsibilities. Another analogy can be seen in businesses, each with presidents, vice-presidents, officers, etc governing them—each with great responsibilities.

Hopefully the analogy is seen. One kingdom has many places where people have authority and responsibilities and at many different levels.

But we can also see that another connotation of being on a throne is that we will serve others. We can see that from Jesus' teaching to His disciples.

*Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup> Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup> and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— <sup>28</sup> just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:25-28)*

Would He call us to be servants here on earth and then give us great positions of authority and not serve in heaven? No. His teaching is eternal. These years on earth are training grounds for eternity. If He wants us to serve others here, we will be serving there—from a throne.

We also see being servants is implied in being priests. In the book of Revelation, we are called to be a kingdom of priests—and priests were always called to serve others.

*and you have made them a kingdom and priests to serve our God and they shall reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:10)*

Though the actual word "serve" is not found in the Greek, the NIV put it there because of the implication that priests serve others. Therefore, part of God's kingdom (from a throne) will be people doing acts of service.

This means that "sitting with Christ on His throne" allows some to rule and reign (with a servant attitude), other to have great responsibilities (with a servant attitude) and others are called to directly serve—or any combination of them.



This is why the scriptures say that even in heaven, Jesus will still be serving us.

*It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. Luke 12:37*

So, even though you are sitting with Christ on His throne, He will still be serving you—as if you're reclining at a table. He'll be helping you every step along the way. So it could be Jesus serving you by saying, "Wow, I really need someone to help Me get this done." He looks around at multiple servants and calls upon you saying, "Would you be willing to serve Me in this way?"

He's looking to you to serve by leading. How would that make you feel? *I'll bet it would set your soul on fire* that He is looking to you as His key servant.

By sitting with Him on His throne, your servant heart will be saying, "Jesus, I'm right here. If you need to call upon anyone for anything, call upon me. I just love serving You." And He will serve you by telling you exactly what you need to do for Him.

Those with the gift of service who finish strong (Nikeo—overcomers) will be serving others. And if in a team, they will be the ones called upon first to lead the team of servants. This will be their "throne" with Christ. As they serve Christ, Christ also serves them. Those who have the gifts of service who do not finish strong, may also have a role of serving, but not as the leader. They'll be under others who did finish strong. Both will be full of joy.

Whatever God will have you do, if you finish strong, your kingdom (of leading others) will fit your giftings exactly. It will be a perfect match for you. It will be as if you are reclining at a table. You won't be doing something God didn't create you to do. Remember the words of Jesus: "a kingdom prepared *for you*." Although the "you" is plural here, you (as an individual) are a part of that plural you. Whatever God has for all of us will be tailor-made for you as an individual.

If heaven is as we describe, ultimate joy and ultimate fulfillment, God will neither give you more than you want nor more than you can handle. You will have complete fulfillment in whatever responsibility/kingdom/service role God gives you.

But not everyone's kingdom will look exactly like the ev-

everyone else's. Some kingdoms will entail positions of authority, others will entail various levels of responsibility, others will be acts of service. They will differ depending upon your personality, your giftings, your likes and dislikes.

I do believe that every one of us will wake up each morning in eternity (assuming we sleep!) with such joy, such peace, such purpose, that we'll want to explode screaming, "I love God! I love my life. I've got such purpose. I can't wait to get to work today!"

This is what God has in store for you. It is what love loves to do!

## **A Happy Street Sweeper?**

But every now and then, I'll hear something a little different than "I don't want to rule." I occasionally hear people say, "But I'd be happy just being a street sweeper." As you might be able to guess, this reply comes from someone who attends church and is there long enough to at least listen to a message like this! So we'll assume they are Christians and are thinking eternal thoughts.

My question to you is this. Are these people just being humble, or is there something else behind it?

Though I sometimes sense humility in the people who say this, others have something else behind the reply. I believe it is a desire to not be under God's will, but to live a selfish, self-centered life in the church. They know that living for God has benefits (they do want to go to heaven), but they don't want to give Christ lordship in their lives. They think the joy they can derive from living life their way is greater than the joy God would give them living it His way. As a result, they hide behind what seems to be a humble statement of, "Well, I'd be happy just being a street sweeper."

After hearing this a few times, something dawned on me. They are not thinking about living a life all-out for God *so that God can have the joy of rewarding them*. They are not thinking about *the glory God gets* in a life totally surrendered to Him. They are not thinking about how their selfishness *reflects poorly on God*. Nor are they realizing that whatever "gain" they have here on earth is temporary and they are giving up eternal rewards and eternal opportunities tailor-made for them to rule and reign with Christ. They are simply focused on themselves. They want to live life their way yet still go to heaven.

Finally, they also are not aware of a stinging rebuke that

will come in heaven because they wasted their life. Nor are they realizing that it's not the fact that they simply didn't earn rewards. But it will be the fact that they lost a kingdom God had tailor made for them. They will lose something that was rightfully theirs. That will hurt.

## Glory to God

In conclusion, seeking to store up for yourselves treasures in heaven can be selfish. It's possible to set up chairs with a bad attitude. But if you seek to obey all of God's Word, you're not being selfish at all. You are seeking God's kingdom first and doing things in love for rewards to the glory of God. With those four motivations, God is pleased. And you will be greatly rewarded.

And the more rewards you have, the more thanks you are giving to God. And the more rewards God gives you, the more glory and joy He will get! Never forget, everything is from Him, through Him, and to Him—even rewards!

Gerald Robison proofed this book before it went to press. I asked him what he thought of it and he told me this story"

*About a month ago, the youth in our area were having a fund-raiser for their local band. They took over a pizza joint and served everyone, and whatever tips they got, they put toward the band.*

*As Sharon and I were sitting there, we were realizing we weren't there to be served. We weren't really all that worried about the food. We were really there to support the kids. So their service didn't really matter.*

*When it came time to tip them, I had three bills in my wallet. Sharon and I looked at each other. The lowest bill wasn't even an option. So it was between the two highest bills.*

*We took the highest one out and gave it as a tip. We were free to do so in part because of your book. With this perspective, we have found that we can give more graciously, more generously and more joyfully."*

I loved his phraseology. (He's an excellent word-smith!) He can give "more graciously, more generously and more joyfully." This is my prayer for you. I hope you can give more graciously, more generously and more joyfully.

## Chapter 16: It's Human Nature

In the previous chapter, we tried to help you to see that seeking rewards isn't necessarily selfish. But that chapter wouldn't be complete without realizing—that in one sense—it is okay to be selfish in this context. I want you to see why.

When Satan tempted Jesus and Eve, he tempted them in three areas. He tempted them with power, possessions and pleasure. Let's look at them.

**Power:** Jesus was tempted by Satan to cast himself to the ground and command the angels to keep him from falling (Matthew 4:6). The power was seen in Jesus commanding the angels. If you command them, you have power over them.

**Possessions:** Satan tempted Jesus with all the kingdoms of the world. Matthew 4:8-9 says, "Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Satan was tempting him with all of the kingdoms of the world if Jesus would only worship him.

**Pleasure:** Satan also tempted a very hungry Jesus to turn the stones into bread so He could eat them (Matthew 4:3). This was the pleasure (eating bread when you're very hungry) Jesus was tempted with.

In the temptation recorded by Matthew, Jesus was tempted with power, possessions and pleasure. In Genesis 3:1-6, Eve was tempted in the same way.

**Power:** Satan challenged her by saying, "If you eat from this tree, you shall surely be like God." He was referring to the same God who created everything—a very powerful God. Satan was tempting Eve with power.

**Possessions:** When Eve looked at the tree, she saw that it was "pleasing to the eye." You can sense that she wanted—not only the fruit—but the whole tree. She wanted to possess it for herself. She thought it would be fun to possess that beautiful tree.

**Pleasure:** Eve also saw that the fruit was “good for food.” In other words, it was going to taste good. Eve believed that biting into that apple was going to satisfy her like nothing else—especially since it had other benefits as well.

Like Jesus, Eve was tempted with power, possessions and pleasure.

As you are well aware, Eve gave into the temptation whereas Jesus did not. But there is one key question that we need to focus on: *did Satan tempt their sinful nature or their human nature?* (Before you jump to the next paragraph, think through this question for a good 60 seconds.)



Now that the 60 seconds are up (I knew I could trust you), the answer has to be that Satan tempted their human nature, not their sinful nature. Why? The answer is clear. At the time of Eve's temptation, she didn't have a sinful nature. She only had a human nature. It was before she sinned. For Jesus it is even clearer. He never had a biological father, therefore He has never had a sinful nature. He's only had a human nature. Therefore, Satan was tempting His human nature, not sinful nature.

What does this tell you that is so key?

It tells us that it's human nature to want power, possessions and pleasure. We usually only associate that with our sinful nature. But that is incorrect. God put inside our human nature a desire for power, possessions and pleasure. It's okay to desire these things. In fact, God put it in our human nature for His purposes.

## God's Motivation

God basically says in His Word, “If you obey me, I'll give you power, possessions and pleasure.” This same power, possessions and pleasure motivates us to obey Him.

**Power:** We've already seen God's promise of power. If we are an overcomer (Nikeo) Christian, we will get to sit with Christ on His throne (Revelation 3:21.) If we overcome and stand firm to the end, we will rule over nations (Revelation 2:26) If we suffer with Him, we will be a co-heir and rule the universe with Christ, partnering with Him. (Romans 8:16,17,



Hebrews 3:14) Ruling and reigning overflows with power.

**Possessions:** Jesus says if we take care of the poor, feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, invite strangers in, clothe the naked, visit those in prison, and nurse the sick (Matthew 25:35-36), then we will have a kingdom tailor made for us. Jesus tells us that for some, it means ruling over ten cities. For others it means ruling over five cities.

**Pleasure:** God gave us a promise through Psalm 16:11 that at His right hand are pleasures forevermore. No matter what happens, as long as we have faith in Jesus to take away our sins, we will have pleasures forever!

So if you can put two and two together, what God is doing is motivating us through the promise of power, possessions and pleasure. Is He calling upon our sinful nature to do this? No. He is calling upon our human nature. Therefore, if God is enticing us in this way, it is okay to want these things.

Sometimes we find this hard to accept because the desire for power, possessions and pleasure are almost always associated with our sinful nature. This is where we get the strong warning from John.

*Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. 1 John 2:15,16*

Note that the key context is “loving the world.” John—and our Lord—warns us against loving the world. If we do love the world, then power, possessions and pleasure take on a new form. John calls it the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the pride of life. The lust of the flesh is pleasure. The lust of the eyes correlates with possessions. And the boastful pride of life refers to power.

Since loving the world is wrong, we associate *any and all desire for power, possessions and pleasure to be wrong*. But that's not accurate.

God wants us to pursue, power, possessions and pleasure. Why? Because He wants to reward us and motivates us to do the good works He gets to reward. Remember, God is the one who thought all of this up. This is His idea. Somehow He fore-

knew that we would need motivation to do the good works He wants to reward. So to motivate us, He basically has promised us power, possessions and pleasure.

“Do what I command you and then I’ll reward you.”

## Rewards Come Later

Whether we are willing to admit it or not, this is the example Jesus gave for us. He did what His Father wanted Him to do, and then He was rewarded.

*And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:8-11.*

Note the word “therefore.” (It’s not hard to miss since I underlined it.) That conjunction is a “causative” conjunction. It is basically saying, “because Jesus obeyed to the point of death, God therefore exalted him above everyone in heaven and on earth.” God rewards obedience and we see this even in Jesus.

Because His obedience was perfect, He was given the ultimate reward: sitting down at the right hand of God the Father.

*The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. Hebrews 1:3*

Let me put it to you this way. When Paul tells the Ephesians that Jesus “did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,” he is telling us that Jesus set aside the right to be at the right hand of God the Father. He set aside all of the privileges that would be his. By setting them aside, Jesus knew He would have to earn the right to go back and be able to sit once again at the right hand of God the Father. And that’s exactly what He did.

Had Jesus sinned, He would not be sitting at the right hand of God the Father right now because He would not have earned it.

So not only did Jesus pay the penalty for our sins, but He showed us that living a perfect life would be richly rewarded by God His Father. This, too, is an example that He has given us.

## ROI

Unfortunately many Christians believe that since they've "prayed the prayer" and go to church every Sunday, that God is going to richly reward them. Doing "church" is their form of "dying to self."

I remember when my son, Luke, was living in Phoenix. He was on staff with a mission agency and was a short-term mobilizer. He was frustrated with someone in his church. I asked him what the matter was. He said, "Dad, this guy doesn't like coming to church on Sunday mornings and he feels that his act of coming to church is his way of dying to himself. That's dying to self? I can't believe it."

Many do believe that this routine of church on Sunday is all that God is asking of them—and their form of dying to self. To them, this is the "normal, American" Christian life and, as a result, Jesus is the one building them a mansion. And because Jesus never does anything half-heartedly, it must be huge!

So what would happen if they really were radically obedient to the point of death? What would happen if they actually went to some of the unreached or unengaged people groups of the earth? What would happen if they actually went to a prison weekly to minister to people? What would happen if they helped fight human trafficking on a weekly basis? What if they reached out to the homeless weekly or actually took someone into their home? How would that build their eternal rewards—their mansion?

Maybe they'd get a bigger kitchen? Maybe they'd have another extra bedroom? Maybe their master-walk-in closet would be larger?

So what? The time spent (their investment) is not worth the return. The return on their investment (ROI) is not worth it.

They believe their mansion will be fine just the way Jesus is planning on it now. Who cares about a bigger kitchen? Who cares about having another extra bedroom—you'd probably

just have to clean it on a regular basis anyhow. Who cares if your master-walk-in closet is bigger? What Jesus wants to lavish on them in this “normal American” Christian life will be just fine. “Remember,” they claim, “Jesus never does anything half-heartedly.”

Anything above the “normal American” Christian life—radically obeying God’s word—isn’t worth it. The cost of radical obedience far outweighs the small benefits. It’s a small return on investment (ROI).

“Let’s be honest,” the average Christian would think. “Say I were to be really radical and go to an unengaged people group. That would mean I’d have to leave my family. I’d have to leave my friends. I’d have to leave the country I love. I’d also have to raise support. Along with that I’d have to go through training—and all of that is the easy part. It starts to get hard when you have to learn a foreign language. Then you have to learn their culture and eat different foods. Then you have to be sharing your faith and hope that you’re not going to be killed in the process. Let’s not even talk about kids and their schooling. All of that’s way too much extra work for a bigger kitchen. It’s not a worthy return on my investment. I’m happy the way I’m imagining my mansion to be right now. It’s just not worth it.”

They don’t know that Jesus calls them to radical obedience. And that radical obedience is going to be radically rewarded—the type of reward they are really hoping for. Many who are living the “normal American” Christian life—happy to simply go to church but do little else—will be rewarded, but to a much smaller degree. Their mansion will be built in direct proportion to their works done on earth. Some will be getting “shacks” while others who lived radical lives will be getting “castles.” Some will be ruling over cities while others will be ruled over. Some will shine like the sun while others will shine like a distant star.

Now let me be clear. Radical obedience doesn’t mean you have to go overseas. It means you have to be obeying what God tells you to do on a day-to-day basis. It may mean going overseas. But it may mean having a weekly ministry in a local prison. It may mean working with internationals studying at a university nearby. It may mean helping stop human trafficking in the city you live in. It could be a thousand things besides going overseas. But it is definitely not simply going to church on Sunday and having our lives look the same as everyone else

who doesn't know Jesus Monday through Saturday.

## God's Formula

So just how do we work for power, possessions and pleasure in a Biblical way?

The answer is seen in the different responses to the temptations Eve and Jesus had. Eve gave in immediately, wanting to have it now. Jesus said “no” now and got it later.

So what does Jesus' way teach us? *Deny now—gain later.* This is God's formula for working for power, possessions and pleasure. And we see it, not only in the life of Jesus, but in His teachings.

*Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 10:39)*

Typical evangelicals look at that verse and focus on the part of the verse that talks about losing their life. We need to die to ourselves. Yes, this is true, but rarely do we realize the result. If we lose our life, we will find it. That “finding” of life may, or may not, mean finding a full and wonderful life here on this earth. Losing our life could mean martyrdom (which means not finding much of a life here on earth at all). But it definitely does mean you'll “find life” in eternity by being richly rewarded—whether your martyred or not.

*Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. Matthew 16:24,25*

Here is the same idea. Picking up your cross back in Jesus' day meant one thing: death. Jesus is basically giving a call to die. Doesn't sound very rewarding, does it? But in reality it is. That's because Jesus once again completes the thought. Whoever loses their life for me will find it. Whoever picks up their cross and follows Jesus *will find* the kind of life that Jesus wants them to have. It is guaranteed by Jesus. It may be a rich and full abundant life here on this earth, or it may simply be incredible rewards in heaven.

Note how Jesus finished out his teaching.

*What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done. Matthew 16:26-27*

Here, He is referencing the rewards that He will eventually give out to those who have picked up their cross and followed Him. And the rewards will mean a full and abundant eternal life.

Jesus keeps emphasizing the rewards God wants us to have will come after we die.

*Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." Luke 14:12-14*

Payment (rewards) come at the resurrection.

*Deny now—gain later.*

Jesus said "no" to Satan regarding power, possessions and pleasure. But for all of eternity, He gets all three.

## **Prayer, Fasting and Giving**

So how do we apply this "Deny now—gain later" philosophy? It's quite simple and quite Biblical. I learned it from Randy Alcorn in chapter 11 of his book, *The Law of Rewards*. And once I saw it, I said to myself, "Why haven't I seen this before?" It is so simple and so practical.

**Power:** If you want power for all of eternity, you need to deny it now. How do we deny power now? We deny power now by refusing to do things in our own power and strength and by getting down on our knees and praying. When we pray, we are acknowledging to God that we are powerless. That we

can't do anything to get the answers or the result that we are desiring. We are totally dependent upon Him to make it happen. And that is what glorifies God. This is why we read this in the Psalms.

“Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High, and call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.” Psalm 50:14,15

As we call upon God for deliverance, we are saying to Him, “I don't have the power to make this happen. You must bring it about.” In doing this, we are honoring Him. That is something God rewards.

**Possessions:** If you want possessions for all eternity—if you want to rule and reign over kingdoms, you need to deny them now. How do we deny possessions now? It's simple, give away as much as you can.

Most Christians, without realizing it, are trying to enjoy as much as they can before they get to heaven. They're trying to die with as many toys as possible. This is the exact opposite of what God wants. He wants us giving as much away here on this earth as possible—so that we might gain as much as we can have for all eternity future.

This could mean buying a Camry instead of a Lexus and giving the extra \$15,000 away to a ministry. It could mean not buying certain things (boats, second homes, etc) and giving that money away to ministries in need. It could mean downsizing in your home and giving the difference away in your monthly mortgage to others in need.

I think you get the idea. Give things and money away. The more you give to the poor and needy, the more rewards you will have in heaven.

Knowing this, you'll understand the words of Jesus to the ruler in Luke 18 so much better. Notice what he asks Jesus about in verse 18.

*A certain ruler asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”*

He was focused on getting his full rewards. How did Jesus answer him? Was it faith based? No, it was completely focused on works.

*You know the commandments: 'You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.' " "All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said. When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." Luke 18:19-22*

Jesus told the ruler to sell all he had. Was Jesus encouraging him to do this on behalf of the poor? No. Jesus said that if he did this he would have "treasure in heaven." Jesus was telling him to sell everything and give it away for his sake.

*Deny now—gain later.*

**Pleasure:** How can we deny pleasure now? You've probably figured it out by now, Biblical fasting. By fasting now, we are saying to God, "I'm going to give it up now so I can see You move in my life in greater ways."

Note the words of Jesus once again in Matthew 6.

*"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. Matthew 6:16-18*

And this can mean much more than fasting food.

I love John Piper's challenge to his readers in the book *A Hunger for God*. He talks about fasting, but in a very different way. He suggests fasting, not food, but anything that satisfies you more than God.

For some men, that might mean fasting golf. They have no problem spending four hours chasing a little white ball, but struggle to have a thirty-minute quiet time meeting with God.

For some women it might mean fasting shopping. The analogy is the same. They have no problem spending four hours shopping—whether they buy anything or not. But they struggle with a thirty-minute quiet time spending time with



God.

For some teenagers it could mean fasting Facebook or Twitter or other/all type of social media or the television or movies.

Whatever we are fasting, we are basically saying, “God, I want You more than this. I want Your kingdom more than my kingdom. I want Your ways more than my ways.”

*Deny now—gain later.*

## Not Worth Comparing

Paul wants us to see that any sacrifice we make is not worthy to be compared with the rewards that we will be given. This is what he is saying in Romans.

*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.  
Romans 8:18*



While I was speaking at the Chinese Missions Convention in 2016, I tried to help them see this point. I graphically tried to portray the cost (\$) of going to the nations against the EROI (Eternal Return on Investment). Most believers I assume are thinking that their return is now worth the cost. As a

result, my graphic showed the cost (\$) weighing heavier than their EROI.

But in challenging them to give up their lives and go overseas to serve the King of Kings—and to earn a full reward—I challenged them to see it like this:



There is no sacrifice that we make—whether we are leaving brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, family and friends—that God does not know about and will richly reward. This is why Jesus taught these words.

*And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters*

*or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. Matthew 19:29*

Jesus is encouraging us to give up our lives to Him. He wants to bless you 100 times over what you give. It's a "no-lose" situation.

## **Conclusion**

Pursuing power, possessions and pleasure does not always have to be pursued by your sinful nature. You can pursue it with your human nature. In fact, God wants you to do it.

This is what Jesus is telling us to do when he says to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven. He is basically saying, "Pursue eternal power, possessions and pleasure."

We can pursue those three things in a way that is pleasing to God. It is done by following the simple rule of "Denying now—gaining later."

Deny power now by getting down on your knees in prayer. Tell God that you are powerless and totally dependent upon God.

Deny possessions now by giving away all the "things" in your life and by giving your entire life away.

Deny pleasures now by fasting. Fast not only food, but whatever pleases you more than God.

Now what if you go through life totally unaware of God's desire for you to pursue power, possessions and pleasure. Will you miss out on it? No, not at all. There are many who have given their lives to the Lord simply to glorify Him. And God is totally fine with that. When they get to heaven they will be greatly rewarded with power, possessions and pleasure. But for them, it will be an unexpected "perk."

*But I fully believe there are some believers who would do more, give more, and go more if they knew about the potential eternal power, possessions and pleasure that would await them if they did step out in faith. Some of us need that as a extra motivation. And God is totally fine with that as well. In fact, that's why He put it there.*

## Chapter 17: A Business Contract With God?

Having spoken on this topic many times, I often get asked, "But what about the parable Jesus gave about the workers in the vineyard? They all were paid the same, no matter what work they did. Doesn't that mean we're all going to be rewarded equally?"

Let's look at that parable and break it down:

*For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. <sup>2</sup> He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.*

*<sup>3</sup> About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. <sup>4</sup> He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' <sup>5</sup> So they went. He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. <sup>6</sup> About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?' <sup>7</sup> 'Because no one has hired us,' they answered. He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.'*

*<sup>8</sup> When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.' <sup>9</sup> The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. <sup>10</sup> So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. <sup>11</sup> When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. <sup>12</sup> 'These who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work*

*and the heat of the day.'*

*<sup>13</sup> But he answered one of them, 'I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius?' <sup>14</sup> Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. <sup>15</sup> Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?' <sup>16</sup> So the last will be first, and the first will be last.' (Matthew 20:1-16)*

Until I read Dillow, I never saw the big difference between the first workers hired and those hired later. It appears the first ones that were hired didn't agree to the original terms of the owner. It seems that the owner of the vineyard had to "agree" to a certain payment, one negotiated by the workers themselves.

One would assume that the owner of the vineyard had said the same to the first workers hired that he had said to all the others: "I will pay you whatever is right." But it seems the first ones hired rejected it. They wanted assurance they weren't going to get ripped off. They somehow negotiated a deal. They weren't willing to trust in the goodness of the vineyard owner.

Yet with the next few groups of people hired, there is no agreement. The vineyard owner is dictating the terms. He simply states, "I will pay you whatever is right." These people, and those who followed, had no deal or agreement. They were trusting in the goodness of the landowner—the one who was hiring them.

Here lies the difference. *The first ones had a contract. Those that followed trusted in the goodness of the landowner.*

In verse 8, the landowner calls them in to give their pay. This is analogous to the day of judgment for all believers. They were going to stand before Christ and see if their lives were gold, silver, and precious stones, or wood, hay, and straw.

In this parable, the landowner calls in those who were hired last and who trusted that he would do what was right. They each received a denarius. The parable then skips to those hired first. Because there is no mention of the other laborers hired in the middle of the day, it would seem apparent that the parable is primarily about the two extremes.

Note the text of verse 10:

*So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. Yet they too received only a denarius—that which they agreed to. (Matthew 20:10)*

Think through this in financial terms. The first workers were hired at approximately 6 a.m. We get this from “early in the morning” in verse 1 and from the fact that every three hours he would hire more (verses 3 and 5). According to verse 6, the last ones were hired at 5 p.m. They worked only one hour.

Think through the math. Those who only worked one hour got the same as those who worked twelve hours. It seems as though they got twelve times the pay! The opposite way of looking at it is also true. The ones hired first got twelve times less pay.

Note the response of the ones hired first—they grumbled. This tells you something very key. They had a bad attitude about the landowner’s grace. It draws the reader into thinking that they served only to obtain a reward—just like the young man setting up chairs in the previous chapter. It wasn’t about seeking God’s kingdom first. It wasn’t done in love. It wasn’t to glorify God. It was about the pay, not the payer. They only wanted the compensation—compensation on terms they had dictated!

There is a big difference between compensation and rewards. *Compensation comes from rules and legality. Rewards come from grace.*

If rewards from God were based on a strict legal set of rules, they would be right. The landowner would have to say, “You know, you’re right. I’ll pay you more.” But rewards aren’t based on a legal set of guidelines. God’s “formula” for rewards is based on His grace, not on any set of rules. Rules yield compensation—and that’s all they got.

The main point of the parable is this: if we “bargain” with God regarding rewards, we will get compensation. It will be at the exact terms we bargained for; there won’t be 10,000% interest. And we will be serving Him out of a sense of duty. But if we trust in the goodness of God, our rewards will be above and beyond our expectations!

Note the response of the landowner:

*But he answered one of them, 'I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius?' <sup>14</sup> Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. <sup>15</sup> Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?' (Matthew 20 :13-15)*

What is he basically saying? He's saying, "I kept our agreement that you wanted. You bargained for this deal and I'm giving you what you negotiated for in the agreement." Now note the very next words: "Take your pay (compensation) and go."

Often in parables it can be dangerous to read into every part of the parable. You've got to look at the central point and then see if secondary issues reinforce that main point. So, does telling them to go reinforce the main point? The text gives no hint that the others were told to go. It seems to communicate they were somehow hanging around. When you go somewhere, you are leaving a place. Where were they leaving?

My guess is that they were being told to leave the wedding banquet. Like the man without wedding clothes (Matthew 22), they weren't worthy to be guests or a part of the bride. Even though they worked the entire day (and "finished well"), the work they did wasn't quality work. They weren't doing it with the right attitude. For them, there was no joy in serving the King. It was a duty—a burden in the heat of the day as verse 12 states.

## **Dutiful Service**

Serving God out of duty is difficult—and offers little reward. But God never wants us to serve Him out of duty solely for reward. God wants us serving Him with joy! He tells this to the people of Israel in the midst of explaining the blessings and the curses:

*Because you did not serve the Lord your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity, therefore in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies the Lord sends against you. He will put*

*an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you.  
(Deuteronomy 28:47,48)*

As the initial workers were told to leave, the landowner said something extremely interesting, “Don’t I have the right...” This simple statement begs a great question: “Does God have rights?”

Here in America, we are constantly probing about who has rights. Do the handicapped people have rights? Do lesbians, gays, bi-sexuals or transgenders have rights? Does a child in the womb have rights? Does a woman have rights over her body? And now, because so many rights have been granted for those with a liberal view point, the pendulum has swung. Now conservatives are asking, “Do parents have rights?” In any case, the concern seems focused on who has rights.

I’ve never heard anyone ask the simple question, “Does God have rights?” It’s a strange question because we never think in terms from God’s point of view. But the answer is yes! God has rights. He has the right to do whatever He wants. And understanding that God has rights teaches us a lesson from the parable that we need to learn. God can do whatever He wants.

So in one sense, God has the right to live out chapter two of this book. But all Scripture points to the fact that He also has the right to reward those who are faithful in greater ways. And Scripture seems to point to the fact that this is exactly what He is doing.

God has the right to reward anyone—any way He wants. If He wants to reward someone twelve-fold for their work (who trust Him to “do what is right”), He can be as generous as He wants. If He wants to honor those who dutifully served Him and give them less of a reward, He has that right, too.

Those who seek rewards based on a “dutiful life” (a contractual agreement with God) are not going to be rewarded as greatly and, I assume, may not be invited as guests or be a part of the bride of Christ. They will be asked to go. Their reward will be the fact that they are in heaven, but they will have lost their inheritance because they did not serve God out of joy (Deuteronomy 28:47,48). They served Him out of duty.

This is why the parable is summed up in these key words, “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.” The last, who

trusted the landowner to do whatever is right, will be greatly honored by God. They will be great in the kingdom. They will be a part of the bride of Christ and will have a great role in the authority of God.

Those who were first—those who dutifully served God through some kind of a contractual agreement—will be some of the least in the kingdom of heaven because they weren't relying on the goodness of God. They didn't have faith; they had an agreement.

Remember what the writer of Hebrews tell us about faith:

*And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*  
(Hebrews 11:6)

The Scriptures tell us that earning rewards is not a business contract. Many people see the rules of Christianity and are dutifully living them out. But there is no joy for them. They will be eternally let down. I love the following poem, which illustrates the same principle:

#### My Wage

I bargained with Life for a penny,  
And Life would pay no more,  
However I begged at evening  
When I counted my scanty store.

For Life is a just employer,  
He gives you what you ask,  
But once you have set the wages,  
Why, you must bear the task.

I worked for a menial's hire,  
Only to learn, dismayed,  
That any wage I had asked of Life,  
Life would have willingly paid.

-Jessie B. Rittenhouse

Don't settle for serving God out of duty. If that's what you shoot for, that's what you'll get. Delight in the King and serve Him out of joy!



## But It *IS* Our Duty

Some people believe that it is our duty to serve God based on what is taught in the seventh chapter of Luke:

*Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? <sup>8</sup> Won't he rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? <sup>9</sup> Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? <sup>10</sup> So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.' (Luke 17:7-10)*

How does this Scripture harmonize with everything else on rewards?

When it is all said and done, and we have lived a life faithful to the end, in reality we have only done what the Lord asked of us. We will have been faithful with the gifts and talents that He gave to us. And faithfulness is one of the key things God is looking for.<sup>70</sup> But when God sees our faithfulness, He responds by blessing us above and beyond our imagination, showing off His grace.

Joseph Dillow gives this illustration:

*If a father gives a large sum of money as an inheritance, with no conditions attached, it is a free gift. If the son then proceeds to invest that money in charitable causes, that is honorable.*

*However, on reading the father's will, to the son's immense surprise he sees the words, "Son, if you will invest this money in giving to the poor, serving others, etc., I want you to know that I have laid aside additional wealth which the trustee of my estate is authorized to add (considerably) to your inheritance. I have freely entered into this obligation to pay you this wage, but understand, the fact that I have chosen to place this obligation on myself is not based on anything other than my freely-given love."*

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<sup>70</sup> Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. 1 Corinthians 4:2

*Furthermore, for the son to invest that money and receive a return was simply a matter of duty, being responsible (as the parables teach). If the son invests, and receives a return, he has only done his duty. In a similar way, God has agreed to grant a reward as a merit, or better, an over-generous wage, but he had no obligation to do so. The fact that He has chosen to give us something we do not deserve in the first place, a reward for works, is still pure grace. In other words, the reward itself is merited and deserved; the decision to give the reward is purely God's grace.<sup>71</sup>*

Though this thought of dutifully serving God can easily be seen as proving oneself faithful (1 Corinthians 4:2), there can be a downside to dutifully serving God which is not healthy.

Like Joseph Dillow, John Piper gives another analogy to dutifully serving God—this time focusing on the negative aspect.

He makes an analogy of a man coming to his house with flowers behind his back on his anniversary night. He then rings the bell. His wife opens up the door and is surprised to see her husband. He's home early from work. Seeing her, he smiles broadly, hands her the flowers and says, "Honey, it's our anniversary. Here are a dozen roses. I've got a babysitter all lined up. Let's go out and have a night on the town."

To her great surprise, she says, "Oh honey, thank you. Why did you do all of this?"

At this point he has two ways he can respond. He can say, "It's my duty" or he can say, "Because you are the delight of my life."

Which one honors the wife the most? Of course, it is the second. If he says, "It is my duty," he's in big trouble! No wife wants to be honored because it is the husband's duty. She wants to be honored for who she is—because she is loved.

This is the same with God. God isn't pleased with us serving Him out of duty. This may be why the first workers who made an agreement were told to "go away." He wants us to serve Him out of delight, love, and joy. Yet at the same time as Luke 17 points out—it is only our duty!

We are not in a contract with God.

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<sup>71</sup> *Final Destiny*, Joseph Dillow, page 972.

## It's Still About Grace

A second reason rewards do not put us into a business contract with God is that God does not have to reward us at all. He chooses to reward us. Why? Because He wants to show off and live out His grace for all eternity (Ephesians 2:6,7)<sup>72</sup>. By giving us rewards, He is doing what He wants to do—without any kind of contractual agreement.

In the final analysis, all rewards are a result of grace and not works. (Even though in the Scriptures the words used for rewards express the idea of some sort of payment obtained by means of effort). Look at how the psalmist puts it:

*Once God has spoken; twice I have heard this:  
that power belongs to God;<sup>12</sup> and lovingkindness is  
Yours, O Lord, for You recompense a man according to  
his work. (Psalm 62:11,12 NASB)*

Note the word “for” in verse 12. It makes a connection between God’s loving-kindness and God rewarding people for what they have done. (Remember, this is about being rewarded in heaven, not having our name recorded in heaven.)

Here is the connection: God rewards us out of His loving-kindness. He is not forced to do so. He has not negotiated a contractual agreement. No deeds of ours put God under any obligation. He does it because He wants to do it. He wants to show off His grace forever!

## His Power

A third reason it is still about grace is because without His Holy Spirit living inside of us, we never would have done any deed that could be rewarded. Just as He freely chose to send Jesus to die for our sins, He also freely chose to give us the Holy Spirit to empower us to live a life that honors God.

Without God’s Holy Spirit, we would be totally lost. Let’s look at the one of the greatest benefits He gives to us. He causes us to love Him.

*The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the*

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<sup>72</sup> If you haven’t read the book *Why*. I highly encourage you to do so. It shows the far greater implications of Ephesians 2:6,7.

*hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live. (Deuteronomy 30:6)*

By circumcising our hearts, God's Holy Spirit causes us to love Him. Oh how freeing this is when we realize that even the most basic of all commands—"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength"—is empowered by God Himself.

Not only does He cause us to love Him, He causes us to keep His commands:

*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. (Ezekiel 36:26,27 NKJV)*

When I read those two verses while a freshman in college, I quit praying "help me" prayers—as if I was making accomplishments in my own power and strength. I started praying "cause me" prayers.

- "Cause me to love You, Lord."
- "Cause me to love my parents."
- "Cause me to love my roommate."
- "Cause me to understand Your word."
- "Cause me to be a broken man before You."
- "Cause me to share my faith."
- "Cause my work to reflect Your glory."<sup>73</sup>

Everything—even our deeds—are from Him, through Him, and to Him.

## **Above and Beyond**

A fourth reason it is about grace is that the Scriptures seem to point to the idea that the rewards we get will be "above and

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<sup>73</sup> For more on "cause me" prayers, please read chapter 9 of *Cat and Dog Theology*.

beyond” the “payment” we would expect. Paul talks about this in his letter to the Romans:

*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (Romans 8:18 NASB)*

“Not worthy” communicates that when we receive our “payment” for the deeds we have done (works that didn’t burn up), we will in no way be thinking *I earned this* or *This seems really fair*. We will be saying, “This is way out of proportion to what I deserve. I can only attribute it to grace.”

## **The Grace and Justice of God**

For me, understanding that we can all get to heaven by grace but will not be equally rewarded nor have the same intimacy with Jesus, marries the grace of God together with the justice of God.

The grace of God says, “To anyone who chooses to believe in Me I will give eternal life.” All you have to do is to put your faith in Christ. It doesn’t matter if you are a thief on the cross, a corporate white-collar swindler, a member of the LGBT team, or a mixture of all three. You just need to put your faith in Christ.

The justice of God says, “If you are a faithful steward of all I gave you on earth, I’ll put you in charge of much eternally. If you are not faithful, you won’t be in charge of much—if anything.”

This means that the thief who gave his life to Christ on the cross (Luke 23:42) will be in heaven—showing the grace of God. But he will not be rewarded the same as the apostle Paul—showing the justice of God.

The thief wasted his life living for himself. Paul lived for God’s kingdom instead of his own and paid a high price for doing so. He was beaten with 39 lashes five times, beaten with rods, stoned, shipwrecked, in extreme danger multiple times, went hungry and thirsty, was cold and naked.<sup>74</sup>

Do you think Jesus wanted to honor Paul more than the thief? Absolutely! Do you think He’d want to reward Paul more for all He went through? Yes! Does He love Paul more? No. But

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<sup>74</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:24-27

they'll be rewarded differently.

Bruce Wilkinson penned these powerful words to sum up the grace of God and the justice of God:

**What we believe determines where we spend eternity.**

**What we do determines how we spend eternity.<sup>75</sup>**

Now his words make perfect sense to me. I hope it does to you, too. God rewards us for our lives here on earth and because we each live life differently, we will each be rewarded differently.

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<sup>75</sup> *A Life God Rewards*, Bruce Wilkinson with David Kopp, Multnomah Publishers, 2002, page 15

## Chapter 18: Judgment Day

Where: Heaven, Judgment Day

The Almighty's face already shone like the sun, but it was clear that it was somehow radiating even more glory than before. Being the Ancient of Days, His face was a mixture of maturity, joy and wisdom. Yet it had a youthful side to it as well. How could both be true at the same time? He was amazing.

"Jesus," the Father said smiling, "I believe this time is yours."

Jesus had been seated right next to the Father on his throne, His face, too, radiating an even greater glory than usual. "I've been waiting for this day for a long, long time," Jesus said with a great sense of anticipation. "Imagine, Father, We dreamed this up in Eternity Past, and now We get to finally live it out!"

He slowly got up and began to look into the heart of each and every person—piercing their souls with His own joy! Although there was a multitude of people from every tongue, tribe, and nation, it seemed as if His eyes were focused on each person with such care and love, as if they were the only ones who existed.

Moving down from the throne, he began to greet his loved ones individually. It took forever—and an instant—all at the same time.

"Xian," Jesus spoke with compassion and fire. "Come before Me and let me hug you."

Xian was somehow instantly transported and found himself face-to-face with pure love itself. Xian cried uncontrollably. Jesus put His arms around him and held him for the longest time.

As the sobbing stopped, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Bring me the Scroll of Remembrance." Instantly, two mammoth angels carrying a massive book appeared. Though it was enormous, they handled it with great agility.

Automatically it revealed Xian's life. Almost like a Facebook

page, it showed Xian's life story: from early childhood to the 30 years of imprisonment for his faith, the trust he had in God to take care of his wife and children, the kind words he gave to the guards who beat him.

Jesus lovingly reached into the scroll and took out all the words which represented Xian's life. The Scroll of Remembrance was then taken away so the focus would be on the life of Xian being judged. Jesus went over and compared it to the life God had planned for him to live in the Book of Life. When Jesus placed the words found in the Scroll of Remembrance on the Book of Life, a fire erupted. The blazing fire tested the quality of Xian's life.

To Xian's surprise and joy, the majority of the words turned into gold, silver, and precious stones. They were piled extremely high on top of the flames emanating from the Book of Life as if being held up by a grid of some kind. The majority of Xian's life was the life God had planned for him! Xian was mature. He had made obedient choices, even though those choices cost him 30 years in prison.

Jesus lovingly took Xian's face in between His hands and brought it to Himself until they were but inches apart. "Well done, good and faithful servant," Jesus said to Xian. "I am so proud of you." Xian didn't know what to say.

"In return for your faithful life, Xian, We have something for you," Jesus said in a loving voice—yet loud enough for all to hear. Jesus then turned to the Father, "Father, here is what represents Xian's life."

The Father smiled seeing the gold and silver and precious stones. "Xian," the Father bellowed, "Because of your faithfulness, We want to give you a kingdom We prepared just for you. You will rule and reign with Jesus on His throne and together you shall radiate My glory to angelic beings throughout eternity."

Then, the focus turned back to Jesus. In an instant, Jesus gave Xian a glimpse as to what was going to be in the near future. Xian was shocked. His kingdom was large—and he didn't just see buildings or cities; he saw multiple, inhabitable planets and a sun. It was as if his kingdom was to be an entire solar system!.

"Father—and Jesus, I don't deserve all of this," Xian cried out.

Jesus smiled. "We know you don't deserve it. But We want to give it to you. It continues to show off Our grace for all eter-



nity. It's Our way of saying thanks for your faithful life there on earth. You have obediently followed Us and you lived up to your reputation found in the Book of Life. Again, well done, good and faithful servant."

Jesus easily grabbed the gold, silver, and precious stones with His hand and handed them to Xian. Xian was afraid the weight of them all would cause him to fall, but somehow, somehow, they instantly formed a crown in his hand that he knew he was to wear upon his head. These jewels were a display of Xian's life for God.

After the image of his kingdom vanished, Jesus gave Xian a big bear hug and then turned to His Father. "Father, this one is worthy to be a part of my bride."

The Father smiled. "Xian, come over here and stand by my side."

Xian did as he was told. And something amazing happened as he walked toward the Father. He began to shine, first like a star, then like a moon, finally like the sun. His face was brilliant and beaming with a brightness that even amazed himself. His body became stronger than it had been, and he seemed to be increasing tremendously in size. He was full of joy and couldn't wait to see what was next.

Jesus' voice then beamed a gleeful cry. "Dimasuay, come here, you wonderful child of mine!"

Like Xian, Dimasuay came out of the masses and was transported right before the living God. Jesus picked her up in His arms and swung her around as if they were dancing. Dimasuay was overcome with joy! She was in the arms of Jesus!

Setting her down gently, His eyes twinkled. "Dimasuay, I've got something special for you. But first, let's review your life."

Again, two enormous angels brought in the massive Scroll of Remembrance. Its words revealed Dimasuay's life. Her childhood to all of her service as a maid in Saudi Arabia became evident. Her financial sacrifices were there. Her every action, every thought, every word spoken, every text sent—it was all there. Again, Jesus reached in and brought out all of the words representing this precious Filipino maid. The scroll then disappeared, keeping everyone's eyes focused on Dimasuay's life. He then placed them on the Book of Life. Another blazing fire appeared.

Like Xian, the majority of words representing Dimasuay's life turned to gold, silver, and precious stones.

Jesus once again easily took them from the fire and gave them to Dimasuay. Like Xian, they instantly turned into a crown. She knew it was for her. She immediately erupted into laughter and joy. But it was nothing compared to the joy she had when Jesus gave her a quick glimpse into what her future kingdom was going to be from the Father. Like Xian, it was enormous. She was awestruck.

"But Jesus," Dimasuay asked innocently, "what about all of the bad things I did? I wasn't perfect. Aren't you going to talk about these and take away some of these rewards?"

"Dimasuay," Jesus said smiling at her, "you confessed all of those. And because they were confessed, they were covered by my blood on the cross and will never be talked about again. The bad works you see in others were deeds of which they didn't repent."

"Oh, Jesus," Dimasuay hugged him again. "You're incredible. I don't deserve this."

"We know," Jesus said smiling again, "but the Father and Holy Spirit and Myself have been wanting you to have this since Eternity Past and We are so excited for you to have it. Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have lived up to the reputation We had planned for you since Eternity Past. Enter into the joy of your Master!"

After another dance, Jesus held her in His arms and said, "Father, this one is worthy to be a part of my bride."

Putting her arms around Jesus' neck, she jumped down and waited for further instructions from God the Father. "Dimasuay, come over her and be by my side!"

Her short legs ran as fast as they could. As they moved, she found that she too increased tremendously in size and strength and began to shine like the sun with the brightest light she had ever seen—a light similar to that of Jesus!

"Fatimah," Jesus cried out for all of the masses to hear.

Overjoyed, Fatimah raced from out of the masses and was instantly in the arms of Jesus.

"Oh, Lord," she cried. "I'm so glad to be here. It was so hard

being a Christian married to a Muslim and living in a Muslim culture.”

Jesus put His brilliant hands behind her head and lovingly stroked her hair. “I was so proud of you,” He said. “And the three of Us watched in unbelief at how you faithfully kept reading the Word of God, memorizing it and praying to Us. Again, I am so proud of you. But now your time has come just like the others. Let’s see how you did.”

Without having to call for them, the angels once again brought in the Scroll of Remembrance. And like all of the other times, it opened to Fatimah’s life. Jesus lovingly reached in and grabbed the words that had recorded her life.

As He took them to the Book of Life, the fire erupted.

To Fatimah’s joy, much of her life turned into gold, silver, and precious stones. Yet many more were burned up. She was a bit puzzled, but thankful as well.

Jesus reached over and grabbed them. Walking to Fatimah, His eyes shown with intense love. Handing them to her, they too turned into a crown she was to wear.

“Fatimah, I was so proud of you. But as the Father and I watched you, We realized you could have done more. Do you remember how you matched Dimasuay’s finances, ten dollars for every dollar she gave?” Jesus continued a look of love.

“Yes, Jesus,” Fatimah said.

“You know you could have done a whole lot more, don’t you?”

“Yes,” Fatimah said, wanting to cry. “I could have paid for so much more and now I wish I had. But at the time, I just didn’t want them to always be looking to me as a purse. I guess I was being selfish,” her words faded.

“Fatimah,” said Jesus in a deep, deep love. “It’s okay. My blood covered all your sins. They’ve all been forgiven. That’s why you’re here—in heaven. But it has affected your kingdom. You didn’t completely live up to your reputation in the Book of Life.”

In a flash, Jesus showed what she was to receive. “But Jesus,” she responded, “I thought with my poor choices, I wasn’t going to receive all of this. This is too much.”

"We want you to have it, Fatimah. We love you. You did so well. Your kingdom could have been greater, but We think it is ample for the work you have done."

"Oh, Jesus, it is more than ample. I am so honored."

As Arabs do, they kissed cheek to cheek two times on each side. Jesus then turned to the Father. "Father," He cried out, "though she could have done more, Fatimah was faithful to me her whole life. She is to be invited as a guest to the wedding banquet."

Fatimah stood in disbelief. She was going to the banquet? She looked to the Father who gave the nod. "Come, my dear child, and take your place amongst those who have been faithful to the end."

As Fatimah went, the core of her body began to change. She too shone, but not like a sun, more like a moon. And though she increased in size, it wasn't a dramatic as Xian or Dimasuy. She was radiant, but not as radiant as Jesus Himself. But for her, it didn't matter. She was here and a guest at the wedding.

Millions upon millions of people came before Jesus and were chosen to be a part of the bride of Christ due to their faithfulness. After what seemed to be an eternity, yet was no time at all, the Father called out to those by His side, "Go! Get into the palace and get ready for a wedding party second to none!"

Full of joy, the chosen went into the palace prepared for a wedding. As they did, the day of judgment continued.

"Gabriella," Jesus exclaimed to the remaining masses as His eyes instantly picked her out of the multitude.

Gabriella's face instantly brightened. As if a wind were behind her, she sailed to the front of the peoples landing face-to-face with Jesus.

"Gabriella," Jesus said with a tenderness she'd never heard before from anyone on earth. "Your life was so hard. Your challenges were so great. Please know I was with you each step along the way. Though you were homeless throughout much of your adult life, I was always there. Though you never experienced love through any of the four men you took into your arms, I was your husband. And I am here now to show you what unconditional love is going to be like and to not only give it to you, but

to shower it upon you as well. Welcome home, My love.”

Gabriella burst into tears and fell into Jesus’ arms as He gently caressed her sobbing body. After what seemed like hours, Jesus said, “Let’s open the books and see how you did.”

Again, the angels came with the Scroll of Remembrance. It automatically opened up to Gabriella’s page. It, too, showed a picture of her and had under her name a list of all of the things she had whispered, texted, tweeted, thought, said, and done. Having slept with so many men, she was embarrassed to see what was written inside. But there was nothing she could do to stop what Jesus was about to do—and anyhow, she was already forgiven.

Reaching into the book, Jesus took hold of all that was written about her, pulled it out, and walked over to the Book of Life. The fire erupted. Placing them lovingly into the flames, He, Gabriella and the remaining masses saw the majority of it burn away. Though she had messed her life up in many ways, she had also been very kind to many people she met on the streets and that proved a great relief to Gabriella. There was something there. After the fire had consumed most of it, Jesus picked up the few gold and precious stones that were left and handed them back to Gabriella.

“I love you so much,” said Jesus tenderly to her. “Thank you for being kind to those people. It greatly ministered to Me. And My Father has a reward for you.” Instantly Jesus showed her a glimpse into what was to be hers. It was a modest, yet at the same time luxurious, home where she would be residing.

“Oh, Jesus, that’s too much. I don’t deserve anything.”

“No one does,” said Jesus smiling. “It’s all a part of Our grace. But this is what We like to do. We’ve been planning on this for a very long time. There’s no way you could stop Us from putting Our grace on display!” She smiled, yet looked down feeling so undeserving.

Jesus then gently lifted her chin so she was looking Him eye to eye. “Oh Gabriella, how I love you. But,” there was a pause that seemed to last eternally for Gabriella, “I have something hard to tell you, two things in fact.

“First, this is the reward We had wanted to give you.” Jesus then gave her a glimpse into what she had lost through her

faithless life. Gabriella's mouth dropped open. "You wanted me to have all of this?"

"Yes," Jesus said lovingly. "Before you were born, We had plans of how We wanted you to live life. It took into account your adoption. It took into account how your adopted father treated you. We knew it all, but still had made a way for you to have a victorious life. I had plans for you to minister to hundreds of women who had gone through the same thing you endured. You were to lead them into victory. Unfortunately, you never fully trusted Us, thus they never came to pass. Had our plans come to fruition, they would have resulted in this kingdom."

"And I lost it because of the choices I made—because of not trusting you?"

"Yes," Jesus said somberly and He slowly turned Himself and Gabriella to His Father.

With all authority the Father said, "Give this kingdom to Xian, who faithfully served me in prison those 30 years."

But multiple angels and people cried out, "He already has a solar system to rule over!"

The Father replied, "And now He shall have more. He has proven himself faithful in a little. He shall now be given much." A messenger was dispatched into the wedding banquet to bear the great news to Xian.

The angels and peoples were in awe at the grace of the living God. All eyes went back to Jesus, who turned his attention back to Gabriella.

"Gabriella," Jesus replied solemnly. "There's something else. And this is going to be hard for you to hear, but you need to trust Me. Everything is going to be okay."

"What is it?" Gabriella said, looking intently into the eyes of Jesus, confident of His love yet fearing something terrible—without the fear.

Jesus lovingly put his arm around her. Gently turning them both toward the Almighty Father, He said, "Father, Gabriella did not overcome through the hard times in her life. She didn't start well, she didn't finish well. She is unworthy to be a part of my bride or even be a guest."

The words took the wind right out of Gabriella's gut. "But

Jesus, everyone else got to go there. I thought I was going to be a part of the bride of Christ too. I asked you into my life. I was taught that all believers were going to be a part of the bride.”

“Gabriella,” Jesus said lovingly, “not everything that was taught in churches was biblical. I would have shown you the truth if you had only spent time with Me in My Word and obeyed it. Only those who overcome and finish well get to be My bride. I’m sorry you didn’t come to My Holy Spirit to confirm that teaching. He would have shown you the truth. But more importantly, He also would have given you the power to make right choices and avoid the mistakes you made down on earth. We had given you everything you needed for a righteous life.<sup>76</sup> You just never took it. You felt you could run your own life better—but it didn’t work.”

Immediately the Book of Life was without flames, without smoke, without a hint of fire. Jesus reached over and grabbed it, showing it to Gabriella.

“What’s that?” Gabriella asked numbly.

“It’s the Book of Life. In it I had written all the things I wanted you to do.”<sup>77</sup>

As if her life flashed before her in a moment’s time, she saw for the first time what God had wanted her to do had she trusted in the Holy Spirit. She could have overcome the pain and shame of what happened to her with her adopted family. God wanted to move her into full-time Christian work helping other women who had found themselves in the same situation she had been in. It was an actually incredible life—but she had made other choices.

Jesus moved His hand over the Book of Life. Before her eyes, the life God had wanted her to live was erased from the book. Her name was still here, but the reputation God wanted her to have was gone.

Gabriella wanted to be depressed, but she realized she was in heaven. How could she be depressed when she was in heaven?

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<sup>76</sup> 2 Peter 1:3

<sup>77</sup> Nowhere do the Scriptures indicate that the Book of Life has anything but the names of those who truly believe. I am assuming that what God has planned for each of us according to Ephesians 2:10 is written here. It may be written elsewhere, or it may not be written down at all.

It was now hitting her like never before that the choices she made on earth actually did have eternal consequences.

She was torn between two emotions. She was experiencing the joy of being face-to-face with Jesus yet also the shame of knowing that she had not trusted in Jesus and that choice had cost her eternal rewards. It would take her a long time to marry those two emotions together.

"Where do I go?" Gabriella asked innocently while tears rolled down her cheek.

"Over here with Me," came the Father's voice through a smile. His eyes conveyed a great, unconditional love.

She didn't want to leave the arms of Jesus but knew she had to. She slowly walked over to take her place. As she did, she realized something was changing in the core of who she was. She was beginning to shine—not just shine, but shine brightly like a twinkling star. Her strength and size increased as well, but it wasn't to the extent of the others before her. She was so happy—yet experiencing grief at the same time. It was an amazing combination of emotions that was new to her.

Yet where she was going was right next to the building where the wedding party was soon to be held. Through the windows the brightness of a million suns was shining as the radiance of each believer declared the grace of God through their righteous acts. Where she was, it appeared actually dark. She was in an outer darkness in comparison to the wedding party.

Pulled between the joy of heaven and the regret of a life full of poor choices, she quietly wept holding the Father's hand.

After Gabriella, multiple people from Africa, Asia, and Latin America were judged. Each time, the angels brought the Scroll of Remembrance and each person's life was scrutinized by the burning fire from the Book of Life. Each was rewarded according to their deeds. Each person's reputation was erased from the Book of Life. This happened to hundreds and then thousands. Each individual came before Jesus. Finally, it was Jim's turn.

"Jim," Jesus said with such compassion. The loving gaze of Jesus picked Jim instantly out of the remaining peoples. "I love—"

Before Jesus could even finish the short three-word sen-



tence, Jim blurted out, "I'm sorry, Jesus. I'm so sorry." Tears were streaming down his face. He was instantly in the presence of pure love. His body began to sob. "I know I ruined Gabriella's life. I know that's not how a father is supposed to act—especially an adopted father. I know she blames me and she is right. I ruined her life for good. I'm ashamed. And my wife knew something was wrong. But she wasn't strong enough to face up to me because of my anger. I didn't love her like you loved the church. And I preached a powerless Christianity to my congregation. I had to because I had no power myself. I didn't even know what to say to them each Sunday. I felt totally traumatized every moment in that pulpit." He couldn't get his words out fast enough.

"This is all true," said Jesus with a smile and a show of concern all at the same time. "And I know you're sorry. And I know your brokenness and shame. But I also know that my death paid, not only the full penalty for all you did, but it paid double for all your sin.<sup>78</sup> Jim," Jesus hesitated and got Jim to look him in the eye. "Your sins have been forgiven. I completely and wholeheartedly forgave you on the cross."

Jim continued sobbing, but now with a freedom of brokenness he had never experienced before. "Thank you, Jesus," Jim said, kneeling at his feet in tears. Jesus lifted him up and gave him one of the biggest hugs eternity has seen.

"It's over, Jim. Welcome home."

After a long embrace with Jim, Jesus' smile broadened and He called for the angels. Their massive bodies once again flew in with the swiftness of a hummingbird carrying the Scroll of Remembrance. And like the others, it turned to Jim's life automatically.

Jim was clean, he knew that from Jesus' own words. But he also realized that his life was now going to be judged. He had nothing to fear, yet everything to lose.

With the greatest care and love, Jesus once again took all the words written about Jim's life out of the Scroll of Remembrance and put them in the fire now emanating from the Book of Life. Jim's life burned up completely. There was nothing left. His life had been a mockery of the Christian life. Though a pastor, the secrets of his sex addiction were now made known to all. Thankful-

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<sup>78</sup> Isaiah 40:2

ly he had trusted Jesus to truly be his Savior. He was saved—yet he was going to lose so much.

Tears were streaming down Jim's face. Yes, he knew he had been a hypocrite. Yes, he knew that the Scriptures taught "through Christ I can do all things." He'd even preached that sermon before, but he had never been able to apply that truth to himself. Standing spiritually clean in the blood of Christ, Jim looked straight into the eyes of Jesus.

"What did I lose, Jesus?" Jim asked hesitantly.

Jesus looked at him with deep love, then showed him the kingdom the Trinity had prepared for him in Eternity Past. It was to have been an entire solar system with 15 planets—all ready to have angels living on them one day.

Jim closed his eyes, realizing his selfishness had cost him dearly.

"Is there anything I can do to earn it back?" Jim asked innocently.

"No, Jim, I'm sorry," Jesus said quietly. "You had 93 years on earth to earn it. And I had a plan mapped out for you to earn it. I gave you every chance in the world. But repeatedly you chose to live life in your own strength and power and rejected the leading of My Spirit. You weren't faithful in anything. You've shown me how you wanted to live life—apart from My leading. That is going to have eternal ramifications."

Then the Father's voice rang out through the universe, "Give this solar system to Dimasuay."

Again, all types of beings cried out, "But she has so much already!"

"She has been faithful in a little, she will be faithful in much. I want to honor her as she has honored me," continued the Father. A messenger was dispatched into the wedding banquet to bear the great news to Dimasuay.

Jim's attention went back to Jesus. In the Book of Life, Jesus showed Jim the life God had planned for him. His heart sank. If only he had made right decisions and obeyed what he had seen in God's Word. He saw all of the lives he could have changed. He saw Gabriella's life—a grown mature woman with a beautiful family. He saw his church grow strong in the Lord and impact

its community. They'd even planted a church and adopted an unreached people group. But he hadn't made good choices and it had cost him dearly. Like Gabriella, the life Jim was supposed to have lived was erased out of the Book of Life.

"I know what you need to do, Jesus," Jim spoke quietly yet confidently to His Lord. "Tell Your Father that I'm not worthy. I wasted my entire life as a hypocrite." His eyes looked down.

Jesus tenderly took Jim's face and raised it back up to Jesus so they were looking eye to eye. "Jim, I've loved you every moment of every day and I'm never going to stop loving you. Hang in there till the wedding feast is over."

After giving him the longest hug possible, Jesus let him go and turned to His Father.

"Father, Jim is not worthy to attend the banquet."

Without needing to hear anything from the Father, Jim looked at Him and said, "Father, I know what I need to do. I'll come over to you." As he walked, he too began to shine like a star and his size slightly increased. He was so thankful, and yet so humbled. He, too, was in an outer darkness compared to the brilliance of the wedding feast.

One by one, each individual's life was judged in love. One by one, they either got rewards from the Father for what they'd done in life or their rewards were given to others. It took an eternity. Yet in the eyes of each individual, the unconditional love of Jesus made it seem like only hours. Finally it was over.

With intense love, Jesus smiled at those who didn't earn the right to be a part of His bride. He waved goodbye to them as a couple waves goodbye to their family before heading out on their honeymoon. He then walked into the wedding feast.

"There He is," cried Xian.

"Isn't He beautiful?" cried the woman standing next to him.

"Yes, He was so good to me all 30 years I spent in jail in China. He was with me each and every day. I was so thankful to have Him as my best friend."

"Oh, I am so sorry you had to spend 30 years in prison," said the woman.

"Don't be," replied Xian. "It was what drew me the closest

to our Lord. I would do it over and over again just to have this closeness to Jesus.”

“I understand,” said the woman from America. “It was my infant son’s death that got me to be serious with God.”

“Oh, I’m sorry your son died so young.”

“Like you, don’t be,” said the American woman with all confidence. “I have my son here now with me and I’ve got eternity to get to know him better. Besides, his death is what got me to realize how selfish I was living as an American born with great wealth. That tragedy brought my world tumbling down. I finally got so low I had no one but Jesus to whom to cry out. Jesus helped put it all back together for me. I can never thank Him enough. I could have ended up wasting my entire life in the blessings God had given us. Thankfully, God was merciful to me and allowed my son’s death. It was a blessing in disguise and changed our entire family.”

As Jesus moved to the throne, a song of praise rang out. It was a favorite of the African Kikuyu tribe and one of Jesus’ many favorites. By the grace of God, all in the wedding hall knew it and sang it in the Kikuyu language. It was a joyous celebration of the beauty of Christ.

Jesus, Himself, was so excited. His bride was made ready by their righteous deeds. His Father had everything prepared. And soon, the wedding began. One by one they each took their place as a part of the bride. The beauty came from all the diversity of the peoples coming together in harmony as one. No greater sight could be seen in the universe.

As they each received their assignment as a part of the bride, they were also given their assignments in the government of God. Some were to rule entire galaxies. Others were to rule planets. Others were governors over entire continents. Some were mayors of cities. Still others were given the assignment of hospitality hosts in the universe. It was a confirmation of the glimpses they had been given as rewards.

Each assignment was according to the gifts they had been exercising on earth. Each felt completely comfortable in their role. It had been tailored for them. This certainly was a “kingdom prepared for them since the beginning of time.”

They even experienced a new joy they had never known on

the earth.

Even though Jesus was in the wedding banquet, the Father's Holy Spirit was with those in the outer darkness. As a result, those on the outside experienced a joy as well, though not as strong. Yet there were still tears. They felt a grief and sadness for having wasted their lives. It had cost them dearly.

Gabriella spoke to the African man next to her. "If I had known how much my poor choices would have me pay such a high eternal price, I wouldn't have made them. I would have called upon God every moment of my life and sought to read God's Word and obey it. My poor decisions have cost me so much."

"I know," said the man from Nigeria. "I had no idea how important those 38 years I had on earth were."

"You only lived 38 years?" Gabriella asked incredulously.

"Yes, how long did you live?" He replied.

"I lived to be 79. I died in a state-run nursing home in one of my children's arms. He was my only child who came to know the Lord. He kept begging me to trust in Jesus. I told him I already did, but he never saw it. That was because I had wasted my life in other ways. I thought all I needed to do was to pray the prayer and then everything would be okay in heaven. I had no idea my life was going to be judged."

"Me neither," replied the African man.

For those on the outside, the wedding seemed like an eternity. For those on the inside, it was momentary. Finally, it was over.

As the doors burst wide open, the first to come out was Jesus. He immediately went to those in the outer darkness and wiped away every tear. Their humiliation was now completely taken away. The blood of Jesus had not only covered their sin, it now covered their shame of a wasted life. They too were now full of joy.

At this point in time, they too were given assignments in God's kingdom. Gabriella was to be a housekeeper at a governor's mansion. Jim was assigned to sweep the streets in one of the cities. The man from Africa was given the assignment to be a

janitor. Each was thrilled at their new assignment. Each thought it was way more than they deserved. Jesus smiled. They were so full of joy to serve God in some way. It was their way of saying thanks.

As each individual in the outer darkness was given their assignment, everyone in the wedding party celebrated with cheers and applause. Those in the outer darkness felt such significance—not only in the eyes of Jesus, but in the eyes of those who had finished strong.

Because their old natures had been destroyed, none were jealous of the others. None envied what the other had earned. None were seeking any greater assignment. None felt cheated. They were satisfied and felt blessed beyond what they deserved. They were home. They were at peace. What God has assigned to them was more than enough—especially in light of the life they had lived.

Finally, the time of judgment and celebration was over. All assignments had been given. And everyone knew what had just taken place. God's grace and justice had marvelously been joined together.

From those in the outer darkness to the angels throughout heaven to those who had been in the wedding hall, a hymn of praise for Jesus reverberated throughout the universe. This was a song familiar to all cultures and was sung in multiple languages—yet in perfect harmony! It was pure praise. The glories of the King were sung with heartfelt cries of joy and thanksgiving!

After what seemed like days of singing, those with crowns upon their head gathered around Jesus and put them at the foot of His throne. In unison they cried out together, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and for your pleasure they were created and have their being."

"Thank you," said Jesus. "But I gave you those crowns. You have earned them. Keep them. They will remind you of the grace I gave you in supplying the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish that which We had planned for you from eternity past."

God the Father looked at God the Son. The Son smiled back and then looked at the Holy Spirit. All three smiled together. "Let's begin phase three. Let's put our grace and glory on display

for ever in Eternity Future!"

## Epilogue

The book of Hebrews has been challenging for many a theologian. It is challenging for me as well. But I believe a big part of the clue is found in the opening verses. Note what they say:

*In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. <sup>3</sup> The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. (Hebrews 1:1-3)*

I believe the author (whoever it is!) was making a point. Jesus lived a perfect life and then was rewarded by sitting down at the right hand of God the Father! God the Father rewards lives lived for His glory.

Hopefully by now you are clearly seeing the difference between grace and works. Grace is having your name recorded in heaven. Works result in being rewarded in heaven.

From this point on, anywhere you see works in the Scriptures, I want you to realize it is talking about being rewarded—earning your kingdom. Anywhere you see grace, it is speaking about having your name recorded in heaven.

For the majority of my Christian life (I'm 57 years old at writing of this book), I had no idea there was a difference. I believe this was for a couple of reasons.

- Those who taught me didn't know the difference themselves.
- Those who taught them didn't know the difference.
- The Scriptures are difficult to understand and many Scriptures can be taken various ways. Understanding

God's Word is not easy.

I have to be honest and tell you that learning this material did not come overnight. I read the books that pointed me in this direction several times before I finally got it. If you don't think you completely understand what is being written in this book, that's OK. Please feel free to read this book again—and again—and again!

But don't miss the big picture. Jesus is calling you to a "best-case scenario." He is calling you to rule and reign with Him as His bride, not merely "get to heaven." Remember, 99.9999...% of your life happens after you die. This is probably why Paul commands us to "take hold of the life that is truly life."

*Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. <sup>18</sup> Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. <sup>19</sup> In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life. (1 Timothy 6:17-19)*

True life isn't merely getting to heaven. True life is ruling and reigning in the kingdom God has personalized for you. True life is getting the rewards, having a "rich welcome" into God's kingdom. That rich welcome will result in a large foundation upon which you will build—forever! That's why Paul can say to them "Command them do to good works...."

Before the beginning of time, God had a plan for you.<sup>79</sup> That plan is to culminate in you rightfully ruling and reigning with His Son, Jesus, somewhere in the universe. Make sure you get that by finishing strong, because many are invited, but few are chosen.

To add one final point, I want to look at one last verse found in the book of Revelation. It reads this way:

*Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. (Revelation 22:12)*

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<sup>79</sup> Ephesians 2:10



Seeing that Jesus is coming with rewards may now make a lot more sense to you. But be careful. Note what the text does *not* say:

*“Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to their theology.”*  
(Revelation 22:12)

Even if you have correct theology, it doesn't mean you're going to get rewards. Jesus isn't worried about having correct theology.

Nor does it say:

*“Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to their religion.”*  
(Revelation 22:12)

Your religion isn't going to be checked at the gates of heaven to see what rewards you get. God couldn't care less whether you're a Baptist, Presbyterian, Orthodox, Methodist or any other.

Nor does it say:

*“Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to their degrees.”*  
(Revelation 22:12)

Jesus isn't into education for the sake of education. It's not how many degrees you get, whether they are from a seminary or not.

Look again at what it does say:

*“Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.”* (Revelation 22:12)

**Don't read this book, put it on the shelf, and feel good about yourself because you can clearly articulate the difference between grace and works. He wants you to act. He wants you advancing His kingdom, not yours.**

We're not rewarded for our theology. We're not rewarded

for our religion. We're not rewarded for degrees. We are rewarded for what we have done.

Go and do the kingdom! Feed the hungry. Clothe the naked. Visit those in prison. Take care of those who are sick. Give a cold cup of water in Jesus' name. Make His glory known among the nations. You will be richly rewarded if you finish strong.

Learn to work for your inheritance, not your salvation.

## Appendix A

### Did The Exodus Generation Make It?

Most people have never thought through this idea of whether or not the exodus generation who wandered around the desert are in heaven or not. But it is an important question and has key ramifications for your life and mine. Is salvation by faith alone, or by faith and works? And if by faith alone, what is the inheritance all about for us today?

So where do we start with these two million (or so) people?

We start by looking at their track record as a people. What had they already experienced or done with God or how had they already obeyed God?

### Their Obedience

Remember, this was the last generation who had experienced slavery. These were the ones who saw the miracles of the ten plagues. They saw the Red Sea opened up and walked through it on dry ground.<sup>80</sup> What did they have to do to see all of that? There was a large amount of obedience required on their part—especially during the last plague.

Let me give you the “big picture” of the story. God was going to send “the destroyer” to go through Egypt and kill every first-born son.<sup>81</sup> But he would pass over the houses where there was blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe.<sup>82</sup> Therefore the Israelites had to slaughter an animal and put the blood on the doorposts of their homes.<sup>83</sup> If they did this, their firstborn would be spared.

Weird, huh? If I had been God (praise the Lord I'm not), I never would have thought up a strategy like that. (God is definitely unique!) And because it was so strange, it forced the Isra-

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<sup>80</sup> Exodus 14:22

<sup>81</sup> Exodus 12:23

<sup>82</sup> Exodus 12:22

<sup>83</sup> Exodus 12:21,22

elites to make a decision. Were they going to obey God by doing this, or write it off as baloney and disobey what Moses thought he heard? Obeying would be very peculiar—and a huge step of faith.

Well, what did they do? They chose to obey. (After the nine plagues they had just experienced, they were probably up for anything!) They took a huge step of faith in their God. They killed an animal and spread its blood on the doorframe of their house. Sounds like a pretty obedient believer to me. They trusted that God had communicated to them through Moses and that God knew what He was doing.

What else happened that might indicate they were believers?

After they went through the Red Sea, they sang a song of celebration to the Lord!<sup>84</sup> Not only were they singing, but the ladies were dancing! That sounds like something we'd hear in our churches today. (I usually think of the women dancing as saved. What do you think?)

As they danced, listen to the words they were singing. It communicates their heart:

*The Lord is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation. He is my God and I will praise him and my father's God and I will exalt him. (Exodus 15:2)*

*Who among the gods is like you, Lord. Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? (Exodus 15:11)*

*The Lord reigns, forever and ever. (Exodus 15:18)*

People who sing words like those aren't really considered unbelievers are they? Do you hear non-Christians sing songs like that? I don't. No, they sound like strong believers.

There's even more evidence that points to the fact that they were believers.

In Exodus 19, God gives them a promise. He basically says, "If you obey fully and keep my covenant, then you'll be my trea-

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<sup>84</sup> Exodus 15:1-21

sured possession.”<sup>85</sup> In response, the people say these words:

*The people all responded together, “We will do everything the Lord has said.” So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord. (Exodus 19:8).*

That sounds like a commitment to walk with God—today we call that “lordship.” It sounds like they want Him to be their Lord. Sounds like they’re redeemed to me. What do you think? (Remember, your answer is very key!)

Note, too, that the writer of Hebrews says that everything they did was “by faith.”

By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned. (Hebrews 11:29)

Now, in this chapter, the writer of Hebrews is trying to encourage us all to live a life of faith pleasing to God. If the people who walked through the Red Sea weren’t regenerate believers and weren’t pleasing to God, why would the writer have put it in there?

The writer of Hebrews is not alone. The Apostle Paul had the same thinking. Look at what he says in 1 Corinthians:

*For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. <sup>2</sup> They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. <sup>3</sup> They all ate the same spiritual food <sup>4</sup> and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:1-4 NIV)*

Notice in verse 1 that they were “under the cloud.” Paul is referencing the cloud that protected them.<sup>86</sup> It was cover from the heat of the day, yet it was a fire at night to keep them warm and to give them light so they could keep traveling. God was taking care of them. That same pillar of fire came down upon the Egyptians, giving the Israelites time to cross the Red Sea.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Exodus 19:5

<sup>86</sup> Exodus 13:21,22

<sup>87</sup> Exodus 14:24

In verse 2 Paul speaks of them being baptized through the Red Sea. The obvious inference is that just as believers are to be water baptized now<sup>88</sup>, these people were water baptized then. It was a symbol of the fact that they came from death (for them, slavery—for us, spiritual death) to life. That's what water baptism symbolizes.

In verses 3 and 4, Paul references the fact that just as believers today are to have communion<sup>89</sup>, so too the believers back then had communion. Their communion came in the form of manna from heaven each day.<sup>90</sup> And the drink they drank was Christ who was the rock that followed them.

Note what Jesus Himself says about those who “drink” from Him:

*Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (John 4:13,14).*

If Jesus' teaching in John 4 applies as well to the exodus generation, it sure seems like they have “eternal life.”

Jeremiah adds more evidence by referencing them as a history lesson:

*The word of the Lord came to me: “Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem: “This is what the Lord says: “I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the wilderness, through a land not sown. Israel was holy to the Lord, the first fruits of his harvest (Jeremiah 2:1-3).*

They were devoted to the Lord. They loved God like a bride loves the groom. They followed God through the wilderness. Israel was holy—the first fruits of God's harvest. Sounds saved to me.

Not only were they devoted to the Lord, loving God and holy, but they were also forgiven. Let's look again at another passage

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<sup>88</sup> Matthew 28:18-20

<sup>89</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:24

<sup>90</sup> Exodus 16:35

in Numbers we saw earlier. To remind you of the context, this is happening immediately after the Israelites got the report from the spies and agreed with the ten who said, "No, we can't do this." They chose not to trust in God. Because of their rebellion, God wanted to destroy them. Here is the story and Moses' prayer:

*The Lord said to Moses, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them? I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them, but I will make you into a nation greater and stronger than they."*

*Moses said to the Lord, "Then the Egyptians will hear about it! By your power you brought these people up from among them. And they will tell the inhabitants of this land about it. They have already heard that you, Lord, are with these people and that you, Lord, have been seen face to face, that your cloud stays over them, and that you go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. If you put all these people to death, leaving none alive, the nations who have heard this report about you will say, 'The Lord was not able to bring these people into the land he promised them on oath, so he slaughtered them in the wilderness.'*

*Now may the Lord's strength be displayed, just as you have declared: 'The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.' In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now." (Numbers 14:11-19 NIV)*

Now, the key is how the Lord replied. He didn't say, "Forget it. They're goners." Look at what He said:

*The Lord replied, "I have forgiven them, as you asked." (Numbers 14:20.)*

“They are forgiven, really? Does that mean they are saved? They’re redeemed?” someone might be thinking.

If it doesn’t mean that, what else could “forgiven” apply to? This author thinks, “Yes, they were forgiven—redeemed and sealed for heaven. And it was not simply of the sin of siding with the ten spies, but of all their sin according to James 1:9.”

Both their actions, their forgiveness, Jeremiah, Jesus, the writer of Hebrews, and Paul seem to be communicating the same thing: God was definitely taking care of these people and they had some kind of a relationship with God. All of this points to the fact that we’re probably going to see them in heaven—even though they didn’t make it into the Promised Land.

## The Two Are Not The Same

So why is all of this important?

Though the exodus generation never got their inheritance (made it into the Promised Land), they still made it to heaven. 100% proof is found in the fact that Moses never made it into the Promised Land either (due to his own disobedience<sup>91</sup>). Yet he is definitely in heaven as he appeared with Jesus in the transfiguration.<sup>92</sup> The lesson learned is this: The loss of an inheritance is not the same as the loss of eternal salvation.

“But,” you may ask, “what about the fact that they grumbled against Moses demanding water,<sup>93</sup> tempted God in the desert demanding food,<sup>94</sup> made an idol in the shape of a calf<sup>95</sup> and didn’t trust him to get them into the Promised Land? Didn’t this mean they weren’t saved?”

Are there times when you and I have grumbled against God? Are there times you and I have grumbled against authority God has put in our life? Did this mean we aren’t saved? I think not. It simply means we’re in sin.

Here is the key point to it all. You can be promised an inheritance and not get it. Inheritances are earned. Salvation is a gift.

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<sup>91</sup> Numbers 20:12, Deuteronomy 4:21,22

<sup>92</sup> Matthew 17:1-6

<sup>93</sup> Exodus 15:24

<sup>94</sup> Exodus 16:2,3

<sup>95</sup> Exodus 32:1



## Appendix B:

### Homosexual Christians?

Knowing all of this (especially the two “inherits”) has really helped me understand God’s position on homosexuality. Typical evangelical Christianity says that all homosexuals are going to hell. I do not believe that at all. I do believe many can have a relationship with God and go to heaven—but they will not be in the inner circle with Jesus. What do I base this on?

In Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, he is writing to a group of believers who are doing terrible things. Believers are taking other believers to court. This was a big no-no for Paul. In the context of addressing this issue, we read these words:

*To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? <sup>8</sup> But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers! <sup>9</sup> Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup> And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:7-11 ESV)*

What is Paul telling them? He’s saying that disobedient people are not going to inherit the kingdom of God. Which inheritance is he addressing? Is he speaking about the fact that they may not make it into heaven—the Levite inheritance? Or is he saying that they may not receive their full inheritance—the kingdom tailor-made for them?

Our answer is found in carefully looking at the context.

In verse 11 he says “some of you were like this.” This is significant. Why? Because it shows that what Paul is addressing is

not identity (are they saved believers or not?) but rather behavior. We know for two reasons.

First, we've already considered to whom Paul addresses the letter. There are two types of people: those who are sanctified and those who call Christ their Lord. Both are believers.

*To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours... (1 Corinthians 1:2<sup>a</sup>)*

Secondly, he uses the term “brothers” at the end of verse 8. They are taking their brothers to court, which means they themselves are brothers as well. He seems to be clearly communicating that these people are believers. But he's not happy with their behavior, which will have an impact on their eternal inheritance.

So what Paul is saying is this, “I'm not doubting that you're a believer. I know you are going to heaven. But your behavior is so bad that you need to realize something. You're not going to get your full inheritance. You're going to lose the kingdom that has been tailor-made for you. And I don't want that to happen to you.”

Paul is addressing unconverted behavior, not unconverted people.<sup>96</sup>

Now, read again who is in that list:

*Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,<sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9<sup>b</sup>,10)*

Paul is acknowledging that homosexuals (whom he called believers in verse 1) may be true believers, but they will not get their full inheritance. They were not faithful to God's Word (though they trusted Him for salvation). They are not going to rule and reign with Him forever. They are going to lose the kingdom that had been tailor made for them. They will suffer loss as

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<sup>96</sup> *Final Destiny*, Joseph Dillow, Grace Theology Press, page 93.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15.

(Churches are correct in letting them in their doors, just like letting drunkards in, greedy businessmen, those who sleep around, etc., but they are wrong in giving them positions of authority. Those are reserved for those more obedient.)

Are all homosexuals going to heaven? Of course not. Many will be before God at the Great White Throne and God will tell them that He never knew them. But Paul knows of at least a few who are going to be there. I believe I know of others as well.

Are there some who will get to heaven and rule and reign with Christ? No. The Scriptures are clear on this. Those who do get to heaven will stand before Christ at His judgment seat to find that their lives' works were burned up. They disobeyed Him on earth. As a result, they will forfeit their inheritance and not be a part of His bride. Jesus will deny them before God the Father.

I realize this goes against standard evangelical doctrine. But with this new insight into the difference between entering the kingdom and inheriting the kingdom, we can now see a difference. And it fits in perfectly with our command to love everyone—even those with a different sexual orientation.

If I'm Saved By Grace, Why Bother With Works?

## The 100 Question Quiz

1. Everyone will be equal when we get to heaven.  
 True  False<sup>1</sup>
2. The kingdom God has for you is heaven itself.  
 True  False<sup>2</sup>
3. You have to earn your eternal kingdom.  
 True  False<sup>3</sup>
4. The author is 100% sure on everything in this book.  
 True  False<sup>4</sup>
5. The foundation of this book is based on God's desire to live out or put on display His grace forever.  
 True  False<sup>5</sup>
6. All Christians will rule and reign with Christ.  
 True  False<sup>6</sup>
7. Christians who are strong most of their lives will rule and reign with Christ.  
 True  False<sup>7</sup>
8. God hinted at this idea of humanity ruling and reigning in the very first commandment to call of mankind.  True  False<sup>8</sup>
9. There is a huge difference between being rewarded in heaven and having our names recorded in heaven.  
 True  False<sup>9</sup>

10. Earning your inheritance has nothing to do with having your sins taken away.  
 True  False<sup>10</sup>
11. Our inheritance is kept in heaven for us, and therefore it cannot be heaven itself.  
 True  False<sup>11</sup>
12. Throughout a believer's life, all righteous acts are like filthy rags before God.  
 True  False<sup>12</sup>
13. God will never allow you to lose your inheritance.  
 True  False<sup>13</sup>
14. The Bible never references the idea of an immature Christian.  
 True  False<sup>14</sup>
15. Though Jesus has an unconditional love for us, He also has a conditional fellowship with us.  
 True  False<sup>15</sup>
16. Scripturally speaking, there is a difference between being a child of God and a friend of God.  
 True  False<sup>16</sup>
17. All immature believers are thrown into hell as a "useless branch."  
 True  False<sup>17</sup>

18. Jesus indicates that His “family” (those He is closest to) are those who are doing His will.  
 True  False<sup>18</sup>
19. Those who finish strong in the Christian life will get to sit with Christ on His throne and rule and reign with Him.  
 True  False<sup>19</sup>
20. When Jesus was on this earth, He preached a best-case scenario which was begging people to give their lives to Him so they could get to heaven.  
 True  False<sup>20</sup>
21. Jesus’ teachings were full of grace and works because He preached a best-case scenario.  
 True  False<sup>21</sup>
22. In order to become a believer, you have to leave houses, fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters and even children.  
 True  False<sup>22</sup>
23. Jesus constantly encouraged us to live with an eternal perspective.  
 True  False<sup>23</sup>
24. Giving a cup of cold water to someone in Jesus’ name will change your eternity.  
 True  False<sup>24</sup>
25. All rewards are equal.  
 True  False<sup>25</sup>

26. The Bible clearly communicates that just as we earn a salary here on earth for our jobs, we earn rewards for heaven.

True  False<sup>26</sup>

27. Although we get rewards in heaven, they don't last eternally.

True  False<sup>27</sup>

28. Our inheritance will never perish, spoil or fade.

True  False<sup>28</sup>

29. Whenever you give away \$100 in Jesus name, you are making \$10,000 eternally.

True  False<sup>29</sup>

30. Because Jesus is going to reward each person for what they have done, we have to work our way to heaven.

True  False<sup>30</sup>

31. The Apostle Paul worried about losing his salvation.

True  False<sup>31</sup>

32. God has put us on this earth to see how faithful we are going to be as stewards with what He has given us.

True  False<sup>32</sup>

33. The two parables about the talents are the same.

True  False<sup>33</sup>

34. In Luke 19, the servant who had one mina and made five heard the words, "Well Done."

True  False<sup>34</sup>



35. God non-verbally is communicating that the second servant could have done more with his talents.  
 True  False<sup>35</sup>
36. A child in Africa with only one set of clothes to his name can earn as many rewards as a rich Christian in America.  
 True  False<sup>36</sup>
37. God wants us to use our gifts, but He's not worried about us maximizing the use of our gifts.  
 True  False<sup>37</sup>
38. God is keeping records of everything we say and do.  
 True  False<sup>38</sup>
39. Everything that we whisper here on earth will be broadcast to all on Judgment Day.  
 True  False<sup>39</sup>
40. God is more worried about what we do rather than our motivation for what we do.  
 True  False<sup>40</sup>
41. Serving God half-heartedly will result in full rewards in heaven.  
 True  False<sup>41</sup>
42. God wants to see if we will make opportunities for serving His kingdom.  
 True  False<sup>42</sup>

43. Our deeds are judged, but never our thoughts.  
 True  False<sup>43</sup>
44. Every time you confess your sins, you should be confessing all of them—even the ones you committed as a child.  
 True  False<sup>44</sup>
45. One day, we humans are going to rule over angels.  
 True  False<sup>45</sup>
46. Currently there are levels of authority in the heavenly realms, but when the new heavens and the new earth are created, those authorities will be dissolved and we will all be equal.  
 True  False<sup>46</sup>
47. Everyone will equally shine the glory of God in heaven.  
 True  False<sup>47</sup>
48. Our new bodies in heaven will be far more powerful than they are now.  
 True  False<sup>48</sup>
49. When Jesus was on the mount of Transfiguration, His face shone like the sun. And since all believers are to be like Jesus, when we get to heaven, we will all shine like the sun.  
 True  False<sup>49</sup>
50. Every believer is going to get a rich welcome into heaven.  
 True  False<sup>50</sup>

51. There will be no crying in heaven.

True  False<sup>51</sup>

52. At the judgment seat of Christ, we will only receive rewards for the good things we have done. There will be no negative judgment there.

True  False<sup>52</sup>

53. In 1 Corinthians 3:15, those who have their works burn up like wood, hay and straw will suffer loss. The Greek word for suffer loss can accurately be translated "forfeit."

True  False<sup>53</sup>

54. Believers who lived a selfish life on earth will have to forfeit the kingdom God had prepared for them since the beginning of time.

True  False<sup>54</sup>

55. Scripture seems to indicate that there will be a public rebuke in heaven.

True  False<sup>55</sup>

56. The Scriptures indicate that in heaven, we can earn back rewards we have lost here on earth.

True  False<sup>56</sup>

57. If a pastor of a mega-church commits adultery and is kicked out of the pulpit by the church, that pastor cannot lose the eternal rewards he has earned up until that point.

True  False<sup>57</sup>

58. Every Christian is entitled to be a part of the Bride of Christ.  
 True  False<sup>58</sup>
59. The term “Bride of Christ” is found in three passages of Scripture.  
 True  False<sup>59</sup>
60. Scripture seems to indicate that there are three places believers can be at the wedding banquet. They can be as the bride, or as guests, or not even invited.  
 True  False<sup>60</sup>
61. Jesus’ death not only covers all of our sins, but gives us rewards that we can “cash in on” and as a result, be greatly rewarded.  
 True  False<sup>61</sup>
62. By inviting Christ into our lives, we now have the possibility of working for rewards which will result in our inheritance.  
 True  False<sup>62</sup>
63. Romans 8:16-17 seems to indicate that there are two types of believers in heaven.  
 True  False<sup>63</sup>
64. There’s a possibility that Jesus could break His engagement to us.  
 True  False<sup>64</sup>
65. Because we are co-heirs with Christ, we get to inherit the universe right along with Christ.  
 True  False<sup>65</sup>

66. You have to be worthy with your own deeds to get into the wedding banquet.  
 True  False<sup>66</sup>
67. When the Bible references, “the weeping and gnashing of teeth,” it is always referencing hell.  
 True  False<sup>67</sup>
68. There seems to be a difference between “darkness” and “outer darkness” according to the Scriptures.  
 True  False<sup>68</sup>
69. Though we will all be full of joy in heaven, we will have different capacities of joy there.  
 True  False<sup>69</sup>
70. The author suggests that in heaven, we’ll have a great desire to serve God because of what He has done for us.  
 True  False<sup>70</sup>
71. The Scriptures seem to indicate that there is a chance that we will be denied by Jesus before God the Father.  
 True  False<sup>71</sup>
72. If Jesus denies us before God the Father, we will be sent to hell.  
 True  False<sup>72</sup>
73. The Scroll of Remembrances records how we lived our life here on this earth.  
 True  False<sup>73</sup>

74. Before time began, God had a plan for our lives.  
 True  False<sup>74</sup>
75. The author assumes that those plans are written down in the Book of Life.  
 True  False<sup>75</sup>
76. When it says in Revelation 3:5 that our names will be blotted out of the Book of Life, the author is suggesting that we can lose our salvation.  
 True  False<sup>76</sup>
77. The author is suggesting that the lives God wanted us to live will result in a reputation that we will have for all eternity.  
 True  False<sup>77</sup>
78. Our names are written in pencil in the Book of Life because it can be erased.  
 True  False<sup>78</sup>
79. If we don't live the life God wants us to live, there is a chance that our eternal reputation that God wanted us to have will be erased.  
 True  False<sup>79</sup>
80. The author suggests that the five foolish virgins never made it to heaven.  
 True  False<sup>80</sup>
81. The five foolish virgins didn't make it into heaven because they didn't live a life worthy of Jesus.  
 True  False<sup>81</sup>

82. Because Jesus didn't respect the life of the five foolish virgins, the author is suggesting that they weren't invited to be a part of the wedding banquet.  
 True  False<sup>82</sup>
83. The public rebuke that takes place in heaven will last all eternity.  
 True  False<sup>83</sup>
84. Heaven will be hell for some people.  
 True  False<sup>84</sup>
85. There will be jealousy in heaven by those who were rebuked and lost their kingdom.  
 True  False<sup>85</sup>
86. The author tells us that James clearly teaches us that every believer who truly believes will do good works.  
 True  False<sup>86</sup>
87. It is wrong to want power, possessions and pleasure.  
 True  False<sup>87</sup>
88. Faith can mean not only a saving faith, but a faith that allows you to live a victorious Christian life.  
 True  False<sup>88</sup>
89. When the Bible uses the word "saved," it is always referencing being saved from hell.  
 True  False<sup>89</sup>

90. The real message of James is that you are not going to be rewarded in heaven for living a selfish life.  
 True  False<sup>90</sup>
91. Half-heartedly serving God may result in a reduction of the size of your eternal kingdom.  
 True  False<sup>91</sup>
92. Jesus rebukes anyone who wants to be great in the kingdom of heaven.  
 True  False<sup>92</sup>
93. Satan is the one who thought up the idea of rewards and is trying to lead the church away from serving God purely out of selfless love.  
 True  False<sup>93</sup>
94. You can serve God for rewards and do it with a terrible attitude and you will be still be rewarded.  
 True  False<sup>94</sup>
95. The Scriptures seem to indicate that living a life full of good works will result in being emotionally and physically closer to Jesus.  
 True  False<sup>95</sup>
96. The kingdom God has planned for you is not going to be something you really like.  
 True  False<sup>96</sup>
97. God wants us serving Him out of joy.  
 True  False<sup>97</sup>



98. The author is suggesting that on Judgment Day, God the Father will get extreme joy handing out the rewards.

True  False<sup>98</sup>

99. God is going to reward us for good theology.

True  False<sup>99</sup>

100. The author is not 100% sure of all of this teaching but sees the scriptural validity of much of it and is preparing for a worst-case scenario.

True  False<sup>100</sup>

- 1 False
- 2 False
- 3 True
- 4 False
- 5 True
- 6 False
- 7 False
- 8 True
- 9 True
- 10 True
- 11 True
- 12 False
- 13 False
- 14 False
- 15 True
- 16 True
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- 30 False
- 31 False
- 32 True
- 33 False
- 34 False
- 35 True

- 36 True
- 37 False
- 38 True
- 39 True (But it will not be if it was confessed sin.)
- 40 False
- 41 False
- 42 True
- 43 False
- 44 False
- 45 True
- 46 False
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- 48 True
- 49 False
- 50 False
- 51 False
- 52 False
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