

Kingdom Workers, God's Word, and Reward

Matthew 20:1-16;

Paul said "If our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world" (1 Cor. 15:19). You can expect hope in heaven; reward in heaven; and rejoicing in heaven. What kind of reward will there be? As we've seen, the word 'reward' is singular in the New Testament, never plural.

I. The parable of the vineyard workers confirms singular reward.

The characters presented to us are a landowner and some hired workers. The image of a vineyard is often used to represent God's kingdom (Isaiah 5:1-7), and that is most likely the case here. This means that the landowner refers to God himself, and those workers in his vineyard (kingdom) are His people. God is the landowner. Christians are the workers. Some people become Christians very early on and some later in the day, but *they all receive the same reward* at the end of the day. The reward is not based on the work they have done, or how long they were involved - the reward is based on God's generosity. This presents us with an understanding of God and His grace toward us.

(A). Grace does not give us as what we deserve – it gives us more than we deserve!

God's Kingdom does not operate on the business principles of this world. God's Kingdom is not like an earthly kingdom - God's kingdom is a kingdom of grace.

(B). The gift of eternal life with Jesus is the reward (see John 3:16; Romans 6:23).

Sometimes Christians are disappointed when someone becomes a Christian just before they die because they've lived their whole life in rebellion to God and done their own thing ... I've heard people say "it's not fair. They've been able to have all this fun and then become a Christian, but I've been a Christian my whole life, and missed out on all that stuff..."

(1). Being a Christian is real life; everything else is like pouring water into 'broken cisterns.'

(2). Rejoicing in the salvation of others is the test that you understand true conversion

(C). For all of eternal life, we all will unfold the riches of God's grace in Christ Jesus.

God saved us "in order that 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 2:7).

II. The Apostle Paul does not contradict singular eternal reward in I Corinthians 3.

Many use I Corinthians 3 as evidence that 'eternal rewards' is a biblical doctrine. Let's examine it.

(A). Paul is speaking to Christians who were not being led by the Spirit...

They were making distinctions between 'preachers' and bragging about who baptized them.

(B). The purpose of Paul is to destroy the notion of celebratory preachers... (See I Corinthians 1:12).

"Who is Apollos?" (v. 5). "Who is Paul?" (v.5). They are but 'servants' *through whom the LORD...*

(1). An illustration from farming... "I planted...Apollos watered...God gives the growth" (v. 6).

The one who plants and the one who waters is nothing, but God is everything (v. 7).

(2). An illustration from building...

Preachers (***we***) are ***God's workers***; you (believers) are (1). God's field, (2). God's building.

(C). Paul gives a warning to preachers in verses 10-15 that they build carefully God's building.

(1). Jesus Christ alone is the foundation upon which 'the building' (Temple) is built (vs. 10-11).

(2). Builders (preachers) have the option of building with gold, silver, precious stones.

These are the great, momentous, and valuable truths of the Gospel, which agree with and are suitable to the foundation (Jesus Christ) they are built upon (John Gill)

(3). Builders (preachers) have the option of building with wood, hay, and stubble.

These are talks that are with trifling, impertinent, and inconsistent with the good news.

John Gill's Commentary on I Corinthians 3:13

Every man's work shall be made manifest - The doctrine the preacher preaches will sooner or later be made manifest to himself, and to his hearers; who shall see a building at first so well laid, then piled up with excellent teaching, or otherwise covered with trifling, inconsistent, and deformed truth.

for the day shall declare it; - Meaning not the day of judgment, though that is often called the day, or that day, and will be attended with fire, and in it all secrets of the lost shall be made manifest; *but the apostle intends a discovery that will be made of doctrines in this world*, before that time comes: wherefore this day rather designs a day of tribulation; as of persecution, which tries men's principles, whether they are solid or not; and of error and heresy (see Ephesians 5:13) .

Because it shall be revealed by fire - "It" is the preacher's work; it shall be revealed by fire.

and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is; - By the fire is meant, not the general conflagration of the world; much less the fire of purgatory, the "papists" dream of, for the punishment of evil actions; for the apostle is not speaking of the actions of men, good or bad, **but of the doctrines of ministers**; the word of God, which is as fire, seems to be intended; *which in some certain times so blazes forth, and will more especially in the latter day, that by the light of it, both ministers and churches will be able to see clearly the bright shining lustre of the gold, silver, and precious stones*; and with so much heat, as to burn up the wood, hay, and stubble. (Note: revival brings clear understanding of the gospel).

If any man's work abide - That is, if any minister's doctrine will bear the test of daylight, to be looked into, and abide *the fire of the word*; as gold, silver, and precious stones will, or such doctrines as are comparable to them, which will shine the brighter for being tried by this fire:

Which he hath built thereupon; - upon the foundation Christ, in entire consistence with the gospel.

he shall receive a reward; from the churches of Christ here, who shall honor and respect him.

If any man's work shall be burnt - If any minister's doctrine he has preached shall be destroyed and disappear, shall be disapproved of, and rejected by the churches, not being able, to bear the light and heat of the fire of God's word:

he shall suffer loss; of all his labor and pains he has been at, in collecting together such trifling, useless, and inconsistent things; and of all that glory and popular applause he might expect from men, on account of them, and which was the snare that drew him into such a way of preaching:

but he himself shall be saved; with an everlasting salvation; not by his ministerial labours, much less by his wood, hay, and stubble, which will be all burnt up; but through his being, notwithstanding all the imperfections of his ministry, *upon the foundation Christ*:

yet so as by fire; with much difficulty, and will be scarcely saved; see (1 Peter 4:17 1 Peter 4:18) (Zechariah 13:9) with great danger, loss, and shame; The sense is he shall be tried by the fire of the word, and convinced by the light of it of the errors, irregularities, and inconsistencies of his ministry; either in his time of life and health, or on a death bed; and shall have all his wood, hay, and stubble

burnt up. Only the gold, silver, and precious stones of gospel truth (grace) will carry him in view of death and eternity.