

The Case for Unequal Reward in Heaven

There are wonderful Christians who believe, based upon their interpretation of the Bible, that there will be different levels of reward in Heaven. Orthodox Christianity teaches that eternal life is via faith alone. However, many believe that there is Scripture that suggests there are various and differing degrees of reward awaiting God's people in heaven. In this lesson, we will address some of these Bible passages. Jesus' words from the most important sermon He ever gave (the Sermon on the Mount):

Matthew 5:11-12: "Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, *for your reward* in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Matthew 6:1-6: "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. When therefore you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, *they have their reward in full*. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you. And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, *they have their reward in full*. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and the Father who sees in secret will repay you."

Matthew 6:6-18: "And whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance in order to be seen fasting by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face so that you may not be seen fasting by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you."

Matthew 6:20: "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal..."

It is clear from these passages that there is "reward in heaven" waiting each one of us who is saved. But if you read the above texts carefully, none of them suggests that there are varying degrees of reward.

The Texts that Might Suggest DEGREES of Reward in Heaven

Matthew 16:27 "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds." This is a statement of judgment for sinners, not a statement of reward for the righteous. God will "repay each person according to what he has done."

Matthew 25:14-30 For the kingdom of heaven is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves, and entrusted his possessions to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey. Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents. In the same manner the one who had received the two talents gained two more. But he who received the one talent went away and dug in the ground, and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. And the one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, 'Master, you entrusted five talents to me; see, I have gained

five more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master.' The one also who had received the two talents came up and said, 'Master, you entrusted to me two talents; see, I have gained two more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed. And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground; see, you have what is yours.' But his master answered and said to him, 'You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I scattered no seed. Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my money back with interest. Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.' For to everyone who has shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away."

- (1). The reward "Well done thou good and faithful servant" is given to both those who invested their gifts, regardless of the return on those gifts.
- (2). The one who 'hid his talent' is called "a wicked and lazy servant." God's people are never called wicked, always 'saints.' This person is 'lost' and doesn't enter the kingdom of God.
- (3). Rather than teaching varying degrees of reward, the above parable teaches equal reward.

1 Corinthians 3:11-15 For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire."

(See Lesson 10). This passage speaks to ministers of the gospel, and the fact if they don't build up God's people (the church - which is compared to a building) with the precious doctrines of God's word (gold, silver and precious stones), then in a day of affliction (not THE day), but 'day of affliction,' the church will collapse.

The Importance of Believing in Singular Reward in Christ

- (1). It keeps everyone humble
- (2). It gives all the glory to God.
- (3). It grants rest to the soul.
- (4). It allows true enjoyment now.
- (5). It directs you to "the riches of His grace."

Questions For Discussion:

- (1). Why is this doctrine of equal reward not preached today?
- (2). Why is it difficult for many to accept this doctrine?
- (3). What comfort does this doctrine bring to you?
- (4). What is most confusing about singular reward? Various punishments?
- (5). Which view of eternal reward(s) gives a greater God's justice and grace?