

## CHAPTER 2

### THE EARNED PRIZE FROM GOD

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

*Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.*

Philippians 3:14

*I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*

The gift of God, everlasting life (cf. Rom 6:23; John 3:16), results only from the goodness of God toward undeserving mankind. The nature of a gift is that it is given without cost and not merited. A gift is defined as “something that is bestowed voluntarily and without compensation.”<sup>1</sup> A gift ceases to be a gift if payment is made prior to, during, or after reception.

The prize from God is distinctly different from the gift. The nature of a prize is that it is gained or attained by *performance*. A prize is defined as “1. Something offered or won as an award for superiority or victory, as in a contest or competition; 2. Something worth striving for; a highly desirable possession.”<sup>2</sup> The prize in scripture is also described as a reward for faithful service.

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<sup>1</sup> *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), Online, [www.yourdictionary.com](http://www.yourdictionary.com).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

Distinguishing between the gift and the prize is vital for a proper understanding of “all the counsel of God.” As Paul told Timothy we must also rightly divide the Word.

## **THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

Once a person is born again, they begin to live the Christian life. This is the natural result of being regenerate. God’s desire for every believer is that they would be in close intimate fellowship with Him. In John chapter 15 Jesus expounded on the necessity of fellowship with the Father. He used the word “abide” to describe an intimate walk with God. Those who abide are able to produce “fruit.” That is, they are able to produce *works* that are pleasing to God. Those works emanate from a Spirit filled life. On the other hand, works that result from the flesh are not pleasing to God and do not produce the fruit of which Jesus spoke.

The Christian life is a life that is lived by faith, not by sight. Since faith comes by hearing the Word of God (cf. Rom 10:17), a believer must know more of God’s Word<sup>3</sup> in order to know how to properly live the Christian life. The writer of the book of Hebrews said,

**But without faith it is impossible to please him:  
for he that cometh to God must believe that he is,  
and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently  
seek him . (Heb 11:6)**

Once a person knows what God has said, via His Word, the Bible, he can believe God, act accordingly, and expect a reward from God. Paul describes the duty of those who have believed to maintain good works:

**But after that the kindness and love of God our  
Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of  
righteousness which we have done, but according**

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<sup>3</sup> The Word of God contains the counsel of God for man (cf. Acts 20:27). All God would have man to know is contained in His precious Word.

**to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which *have believed* in God might be *careful to maintain* good works. These things are good and *profitable* unto men. [Emphasis mine] (Titus 3:4-8)**

Paul explains good works are “profitable” for those who are already believers. The emphasis is upon gaining a profit from the good works.

The old nature, which is carnal, is still very much alive. However, a new nature exists which is spiritual.<sup>4</sup> Paul described a struggle between the old nature and the new nature in Romans chapter 7. Both natures demand to be satisfied. The issue confronting every Christian with reference to these two natures is which one will he allow to control his life? Which one will he feed? Which one will he starve? Much of the New Testament is written with this struggle in mind.

The writer to the Hebrews likened the Christian life to a race. Notice his admonition:

**Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross,**

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<sup>4</sup> The new nature is the result of the Spirit of God imparting life to the spirit of an individual. Hence, when we are saved from eternal punishment in the lake of fire, we experience salvation of our **spirit**.

**despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2)**

Paul also likened the Christian life to a race. He asked the Corinthians,

**Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? (1 Corinthians 9:24a)**

Both of these passages indicate there is a purpose for the Christian life. If the purpose of the Christian life was to simply go to heaven, then God would just take us on to heaven. However, there is a grand purpose for every Christian. Paul told the Romans God's purpose for the Christian was to conform them to the image of Christ (cf. Rom 8:29). In short, we are to be *imitations* of Christ.

The most striking attribute of Jesus while upon earth was His love. In Philippians chapter 2, Paul admonishes the Philippians to love one another and to be attentive to the needs of others. He encourages them to be in unity and avoid selfishness. Paul told the Philippians to,

**Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. (Phil 2:5)**

The mind of Christ was that of a loving obedient servant. Christ's example of humility, meekness, and service to God is the path in which every believer is "counseled" by God to follow. Christ endured trials and temptation; Christ was a man of prayer and study; Christ was a meek, humble, Spirit led man. Christ was obedient to the Father's will. Because of His obedience he was *rewarded* with a name that is above every name (cf. Phil 2:9-11; Eph 1:21). Thus, because of His obedience to the will of the

Father, Christ was placed in a position of authority over all mankind.<sup>5</sup>

## REWARDS

The subject of rewards is a major doctrine taught in scripture. “The Greek word translated “rewards” is *misthos*. When a day laborer worked a twelve-hour day, he was paid his wages, or *misthos*.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, the idea of reward is that of payment for services rendered. The specific word *misthos* occurs twenty-nine times in the New Testament. However, the concept of rewards transcends the word *misthos*. Other key phrases relative to the subject of reward, especially in the New Testament, include “approval”, “disapproval”, “ruling with Christ”, “inheriting the kingdom”, “reaping everlasting life”, “inheriting eternal life”, “blameless”, “being confessed by Christ”, “confidence or shame at His coming”, “the judgment seat of Christ”, and “Jesus as Judge.”<sup>7</sup>

It must be thoroughly and completely understood that the doctrine of rewards is not a way to attain heaven by good works. Rewards are primarily taught with the redeemed people of God in mind. Only those who have received the gift of everlasting life are eligible to enjoy the possibility of earning a reward through works. Paul explains this best by saying,

**For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, *created* in Christ Jesus *unto good works*, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. [emphasis mine] (Eph 2:8-10)**

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<sup>5</sup> Since Christ is both God and man it is important to understand His achievement. As a man, the second man and last Adam (cf. 1 Cor 15:45-47), Christ regained what the man Adam lost – rulership over the earth (cf. Heb 1-2). He regained the seat of authority which Adam lost when he sinned.

<sup>6</sup> Robert N. Wilkin, *The Road to Reward* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2003), 18.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 18-19.

Salvation is the gift of God. Upon receipt of the gift, it is God's will and pre-determined plan that Christians *should* perform good works. Only after a person is saved can they perform works that God will consider "good." Thus, good works are the works God will reward and they can only be produced by Christians.

## **JESUS' TEACHING ON REWARDS**

The Lord Jesus spoke frequently about the subject of rewards. In fact, Jesus strongly encouraged His followers to seek rewards. Some people feel it self serving to seek rewards. However, this attitude is in contradiction to the admonition of the Lord Jesus. He wants believers to seek reward. As we shall see, reward is part of God's plan to show forth His marvelous grace.

In the famous Sermon on the Mount Jesus spoke to his disciples about how they were to live as His followers. The Sermon on the Mount is not a treatise on how to become a child of God (i.e. be born again). Rather, it is direct instruction from the Lord Jesus Christ on how to live and please God. Notice Jesus doctrine in the beatitudes:

**Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in**

**heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets  
which were before you. (Matt 5:3-12)**

In these verses Jesus describes a Spirit filled believer; one who is in fellowship with the Lord and walking in victory. A striking fact should be apparent, victory involves a fight; which usually involves suffering. This passage describes the blessings awaiting those who are faithful to the Lord. Verse 3 proclaims those who are humble will possess the “kingdom of heaven.” Verse 5 describes the meek as those who “inherit the earth”. Both of these rewards describe a form of ownership faithful believers will have in the future kingdom of God. Verse 12 describes the outlook such a person should have. Exceeding gladness and joy should be the outlook of the person Jesus describes. Why, because reward in heaven (in the heavenly realm) awaits those who are persecuted for His sake. Notice He did not say the reward *of* heaven, but reward *in* heaven.

Further in the sermon, Jesus admonishes His disciples to pray and give with the proper motive. If they heed His words, reward is promised (cf. Matt 6:1-6). Again, in chapter six Jesus encourages His disciples to

**Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon  
earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and  
where thieves break through and steal: But lay  
up for yourselves *treasures in heaven*, where  
neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where  
thieves do not break through nor steal”  
[emphasis mine] (Matt 6:19-20).**

Jesus did not say lay up treasures in order to get to heaven. He said to lay them up *in* heaven. In order to lay up a treasures in heaven, it is understood one must have a heavenly account in which to place the treasures. Also notice the use of the plural “treasures.” Jesus is teaching His disciples to make *lasting investments* in the bank of heaven. He knows believers will be in heaven (i.e. they have an account in heaven) and wants them to

realize the importance of having *wealth* in heaven.<sup>8</sup> The idea of wealth in heaven is another way of describing reward. Again, according to the Lord Jesus, it is not selfish to seek treasures or wealth in heaven. In fact, He commands us to do so. Wealth in heaven is the will of God for every believer. Whether all believers will heed Jesus advice and fulfill God's will is up to them. Believers must want to be victorious and gain riches in the world to come.

Later in Matthew, shortly after Peter's famous proclamation of Jesus being "the Christ, the son of the living God;" a description of the Messiah, Jesus described the reward of those who followed him in obedience. Those believers who would be willing to take up their cross and follow Christ would be rewarded for their actions. Jesus proclaimed,

**For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall *reward every man according to his works*. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom. (Matt 16:27-28)**

Notice, the reward according to works is closely tied to the future kingdom.

In Matt 19:27-30, the disciples were wondering what benefit they would receive in exchange for their commitment to following Jesus. Jesus told them they would reign in the millennial kingdom with Him over the nation of Israel. He went on to say that anyone who forsook earthly pleasures in exchange for service to Himself would be greatly compensated. Jesus promised a return on investment of 100 times (this represents a 10,000% rate of

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<sup>8</sup> The idea of wealth in heaven is difficult for some. However, the scriptures teach there would be different degrees of privilege and or responsibility among those in heaven. All believers are encouraged to seek the imperishable riches in the ages to come. However, not all believers seek these riches, but instead seek the temporal riches of the current age.

return). The answer need not be understood literally; Jesus was simply saying the reward for faithful service is immense.

In Matt 24:42-47 Jesus used a short parable to describe His intent to reward the “wise and faithful” servant with rulership over His entire domain (cf. Rev 3:21)! Later in Matt 25:14-30 Jesus, via another parable, describes how He will judge His servants for the work they accomplished with the talents He gave them. Rulership over much<sup>9</sup> is promised for those who are obedient.<sup>10</sup> Notice the servants are His servants; these judgments do not have reference to the gift of eternal life.<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that rulership is denied for the disobedient.<sup>12</sup> Thus, rulership with Christ is a *reward* (i.e. recompense or payment) for faithfulness. It must not be confused with the *gift* of eternal life. There are numerous other passages in the gospels which testify further of Jesus teaching on reward. Please turn your attention to the book of Revelation to see more of Jesus teaching on reward.

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<sup>9</sup> Notice the difference in commendation, privilege, and responsibility between the two parables. In Matt 24:42-47, the servant is called “faithful and wise” and the resulting reward is over all. In Matt 25:14-30 the obedient servant is called “good and faithful” and is ruler over much, but not all. Further delineation can be seen in the parable of the pounds in Luke 19:11-26 where Jesus addresses the obedient servant as a “good servant” and rewards him with rulership over cities. Thus, a difference in commendation, privilege and responsibility is noted. Different degrees of obedience and faithfulness will be rewarded accordingly by the righteous Judge, The Lord Jesus Christ, at the Bema.

<sup>10</sup> In many of Jesus parables he dealt with judgment of works. These parables do not relate to salvation by grace through faith per say. The focus of these types of parables is to emphasize the justice of God in relation to obedience and disobedience.

<sup>11</sup> The matter of eternal life has already been decided. Those who are in Christ have eternal life; those who are not in Christ don’t have eternal life. Jesus paid the price and underwent the judgment of God for all men. When a sinner believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, they are born again. The sin of Adam, which plunged all mankind into sin, is forgiven. The believer is a possessor of eternal life at the moment of belief. The nature of eternal life is that it never ends. Thus, those who possess eternal life will never undergo judgment to determine if they have something they already possess and they can not lose; they have passed from death to life (cf. John 3:16, 18, 36).

<sup>12</sup> The disobedient Christian will be negatively rewarded. They are placed in the outer darkness, outside the realm of prominence of the kingdom.

In the Revelation chapters two and three, Jesus speaks directly to seven New Testament churches. The subject is their *performance* as believers. They are to remain faithful and produce good works. Jesus identifies their strengths and weaknesses. To each of the churches Jesus proclaims, “I know thy works.” To six of the seven churches Jesus counsels them to heed His correction. Only one of the churches escapes a direct rebuke from the Lord. To this church, the church at Philadelphia, Jesus warns them to remain faithful and says,

**Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast  
which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.  
(Rev 3:11)**

These believers are to make sure they remain faithful in order to retain their reward. We all should take heed to these words. If we are currently faithful, we should not grow weary in well doing. We should heed Jesus words and guard our crown. It is more valuable than we can really imagine. It must be noted again that Jesus is speaking to His own; to believers. He is evaluating their performance. He tells them if they will “overcome” He will reward them with special condemnations, positions, and privileges. Please note these seven rewards for the overcoming Christian.<sup>13</sup>

**He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit  
saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh  
will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the  
midst of the paradise of God. (Rev 2:7)**

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<sup>13</sup> Some would argue that all Christians are overcomers citing 1 John 5:4. However, the type of overcoming Jesus encourages in Revelation is not something He has already accomplished for Christians. Christians have already overcome in one aspect through the work of Christ on their behalf (i.e. a positional aspect of overcoming). The admonition to overcome in Revelation is practical in nature and not positional in nature. Those who have overcome positionally are to then go on and overcome practically. Thus, to overcome positionally does not guarantee one will overcome practically.

**Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death. (Rev 2:10-11)**

**He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it. (Rev 2:17)**

**And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star. (Rev 2:26-28)**

**5 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. (Rev 3:5)**

**12 Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of**

**heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. (Rev 3:12)**

**21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. (Rev 3:21)**

For the *overcoming* Christian, Jesus reveals special rewards of intimacy, position, and privilege with Him in these chapters. The Lord Jesus Christ greatly desires for every believer to overcome and share eternal privilege and intimacy. His admonition to preserve and overcome shows God's desire to give His children blessing. *This is at the heart of His teaching on reward.* Please *realize* the overwhelming privilege of co-rulership with the Lord Jesus during His reign! Think about the privilege of being at the King's table serving Him in an all important role. Imagine being the "right hand" of the Lord. Think about how Jesus will rule the earth in righteousness, love, and mercy; in much contrast to how Satan currently rules. Then imagine being an *integral* part of that rule. Some are saved and satisfied with just having a home in heaven. That is not God's will for us, it is far more. Think about Jesus giving you direct orders to administer His will on earth. Pondering these facts allow us to just begin to realize what lies in store for those who love Him. Notice what Jesus says in Matthew concerning the privilege of the least of those in His kingdom.

**11 Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. (Matt 11:11)**

Jesus is emphasizing the privilege John the Baptist had as a prophet who lived to see the Messiah. Imagine the honor John the Baptist had of baptizing the Lord Jesus. Imagine John's privilege

of bringing Jesus up out of the water and hearing the commendation of the Father saying Jesus was His son and He was well pleased. Jesus was obedient to the Father and that is the reason God was pleased. Jesus goes on to reveal that the least, not the greatest, in His messianic kingdom, will have more privilege than John the Baptist. Jesus is certainly not encouraging us to be the least in the kingdom. Rather, we know He wants us to be the greatest. Being the greatest will allow us fellowship and intimacy with the Lord that our minds can not imagine.

In John chapter 14 Jesus describes a believer who is in fellowship with Him and enjoying the fruit of that fellowship. Notice His words:

**21 He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and *I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.* 22 Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? 23 Jesus answered and said unto him, *If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.* (John 14:21-23)**

Jesus and the Father desire to love and fellowship with obedient believers. They want obedient believers to have an abundance of blessings. The most important of which is close intimate fellowship with the King, the Lord Jesus Christ, during His messianic reign and throughout the eternal ages. This privilege and honor will not be available to those believers who decide to walk contrary to His word. Those who do not keep Christ's commandments will not enjoy the type of fellowship Jesus describes above; on this earth or in the ages to come. Sadly, not all will take advantage of this extraordinary privilege. In the last chapter of the Revelation, Jesus makes a final plea to believers,

**And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.” (Rev 22:12)**

## **PAUL’S TEACHING ON REWARDS**

Contrary to popular belief, the Apostle Paul’s focus of ministry was not on evangelism. Paul’s focus was to proclaim “all the counsel of God.” Paul was concerned with heeding Jesus’ command to make disciples. Evangelization was indeed important, but it was not Paul’s focus. His ministry was among the churches to help them grow in faith. The outcome at the judgment seat of Christ was the motivating factor for Paul. Notice Paul’s desire for the Ephesians:

**Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of *wisdom* and revelation in the *knowledge* of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.” [Emphasis mine] (Eph 1:15-18)**

Paul’s emphasis was upon wisdom and knowledge for the churches (cf. Col 1:9-10). He spent months and years with numerous churches instructing them in the mysteries of the Word of God. In numerous places throughout his epistles, Paul told believers he did not want them to be ignorant. He labored so believers would obtain a mature status (cf. 1 Thes 2:12, 19-20). He was committed to seeing believers move beyond carnality to spirituality. Paul knew those believers who were mature, i.e. spiritual, would be rewarded and given commendation, privileges, and responsibilities by the Lord Jesus. This desire for maturity and

hence reward can be seen in his introductory remarks to the Philippians,

**For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ. And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ. (Phil 1:8-10)<sup>14</sup>**

Paul desired for these believers to be full of love and knowledge. He wanted them to make proper wise choices in their lives. The reason was so that they would honor God and be found faithful at the judgment seat of Christ. Of course reward would be the end result.

Make no mistake, Paul *commanded* believers to strive for reward. To the Corinthian believers he admonished:

**Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. (1 Cor 9:24-27)**

In this famous passage Paul reveals the importance of striving for the prize, i.e. the reward of an incorruptible crown. He likens the Christian experience to a race; likely an Olympic type

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<sup>14</sup> In numerous passages Paul encourages believers to conduct themselves in such a way so as to gain reward (cf. Rom. 8:17; 1 Cor. 3:11-15; 2 Cor. 5:8-11; Eph. 4:1; Phil. 2:12-16; 3:10-14; Col. 3:23-25; 1 Thess. 2:12).

race held in Greece. His readers were familiar with these games and would understand the figurative language. Paul tells them to run so they might obtain the prize. The prize is identified as an incorruptible crown. Paul indicates that we are in the race in order to obtain this crown. Thus, the *purpose* for the Christian life is identified by Paul in this passage; *it is to be crowned*. God's purpose for fallen man is that man might regain the position of rulership he lost when Adam fell. Since Jesus is the last Adam, this is now possible. Just as Jesus was faithful and obedient and given a name above every name, so are obedient overcoming Christians to be exalted in a similar manner. It is God's desire to crown every believer. The crown is a literal crown that may be won by the Christian if he is declared a winner (overcomer) by the Lord Jesus at the judgment seat of Christ. This crown denotes rulership with Christ in his coming kingdom. Only those with crowns will rule.

Paul provides further insight to this glorious truth by revealing his personal race for the crown. He indicates the race is a stark reality that requires extreme precision and discipline. Just as a runner in the Olympic Games would go to extreme measures to train his body, so does Paul train his spiritual man. He reveals how important it is for him to guard himself from the effects and influence of the world system. His eye is upon pleasing the Lord. He knows even he can preach these truths to others and yet himself fail the test and be a castaway. The word castaway is the Greek word *adokimos* which means to be "disapproved or rejected." Paul desired the approval of the Lord and receipt of the crown. He fears his Lord's disapproval and subsequent loss of the crown. Paul desired to hear the commendation, "well done."

In the book of Philippians Paul again described his personal pursuit of reward.

**Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil 3:13-14)**

At the time He wrote this letter, he knew he had not attained the prize. He acknowledged his supreme desire to leave anything and everything behind in pursuit of the high calling, the prize of shared rulership with the Son of God.

With reference to the high calling of God, please notice the Eph 1:15-18 passage again. Paul is praising the Ephesian believers for their faith and love. He is praying for them and mentions his specific petition. He desires for these saved individuals to more fully understand what God desires for them. He wants them to become knowledgeable and wise. He wants them to know all the counsel of God. He wants them to be enlightened with reference to the hope of Christ's calling. He also wants them to understand the riches available to them via the inheritance. These subjects extend beyond positional truths of spirit salvation, i.e. the gift of eternal life. Paul wants them to become wise; wisdom is defined as experiential knowledge. Paul knows these truths are important for believers to *know*; thus he prays specifically.

So, what is "the hope of his calling?" It can not refer to eternal life, for these are already believers who know they have eternal life; they do not hope for eternal life, they know they already possess eternal life. The hope of his calling directly relates to the high calling of God Paul mentions in Phil 3:14. It is the potential for every believer to experience the ultimate purpose for his creation; to have dominion over God's creation, the earth, and enjoy joint-heirship with Jesus. Jesus has made it possible for man to be restored to this blessed position of authority. Jesus will reward each man according to his work. Those who are wise (i.e. those who preserve in the faith) and heed the word of God will be rewarded by Jesus in his coming kingdom. This is the "hope" Paul prayed the Ephesian believers would understand. It goes far beyond knowing we are saved and going to heaven. It is a motivation for serving God through the tough times. We must note it is not a guarantee (we don't hope for something that is guaranteed), for it requires our perseverance.

The mention of inheritance speaks further of this calling. In Acts 20:32 Paul says,

**32 And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an *inheritance* among all them which are sanctified.**

Paul mentions the fact that the Word of God is able to build up believers and give them an inheritance. Certainly the inheritance to which he is referring is not eternal life. It is the privilege of *ownership* with Christ in the coming kingdom. The ramifications of ownership in the coming millennial kingdom for man are staggering. God in His infinite love and wisdom has made it possible for faithful believers to enjoy positions and privileges that are beyond imagination. We saw these positions and privileges taught by the Lord Jesus in the gospels and they are also at the heart of Paul's teaching on reward. It must be reiterated that this is the ultimate purpose for which God has called man; to have dominion over His creation.

Later in his ministry, possibly hours before his execution, Paul was able to say,

**For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. (2 Tim 4:6-8)**

By special revelation and an honest evaluation of His life, Paul was able to rejoice in the fact of reward. He left every believer the "good news" of reward for faithfulness. Those who are desirous of Christ's appearing, i.e. Christ's return to establish His kingdom, can be sure of a crown. Those with crowns will rule with Christ. Those without crowns will not rule.

## CONCLUSION

Without doubt the doctrine of rewards is a major teaching seen through the New Testament. It permeates the teachings of New Testament writers. This teaching is in no way contradictory to the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith. Only those who have received the gift are eligible to run for the prize. Thus, the teaching of reward compliments the teaching of salvation by grace through faith alone.

Rewards emanate from the grace of God. In His sovereign plan, God determined man would be a ruler over His creation. Honor and privilege belong to the believer who submits to the Lord and seeks His will. His will being to reward the *qualifying* believer with the position of authority over creation as a co-ruler with Jesus.

Scripture reveals believers are predestined to be like Christ and to share in His glory. The purpose of the Christian life is to conform the believer into the image of Christ. Just as Christ, because of His faithfulness and obedience, will reign, so will obedient Christians. Believers are in *training for reigning*. Thus, *every effort* should be made to fulfill God's will for our lives and realize the full potential that lies ahead.