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A0653 – December 31, 2006 – Rev 2, 3, 22:12 – My Reward Is With Me - Part 2

Let's review the three judgments of the believer.

1. **Judged as Sinners.** This judgment was borne by our substitute Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

2. **Judged as Children.** These judgments are in time in the form of divine discipline and even pre-mature death.

1 Corinthians 11:31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. **32** But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.

3. **Judged as Servants.** This judgment is a judgment of deeds that takes place at the judgment seat of Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

A study of rewards is important because the word of God makes it important. You just can't escape it. Some believers want to avoid even thinking about rewards because they think that it's more ethical to do good works simply because they want to and not because they know they're going to be rewarded. This is a serious issue in evangelicalism. Is it sinful to want

reward for good works? The answer of the NT is an emphatic “No”. Paul commanded us to run so as to win the prize of an imperishable crown (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). If we disobey this command it is sin. Therefore it is sin not to live our lives so as to be rewarded. Paul himself looked forward to the day he would be rewarded (2 Timothy 4:7-8). There is everything right about living our lives so as to be rewarded and everything wrong with not living our lives so as to be rewarded. In fact, to live our lives merely for the sake of doing and not for the sake of reward is an atheistic ethic. All consistent atheists adopt the moral ethic that it is a higher ethic to be moral for the sake of being moral than to be moral for some kind of recompense. When you talk to atheists about morality and ask them “If God does not exist then why be moral?” “Why help the little old lady?” “Why give to charity?” “Why be faithful to your wife?” If there’s no recompense for these things then why do them? What’s their answer? “You Christians do good to get rewarded from a higher being but we Atheists do good merely for the sake of being moral and it’s a higher ethic to be moral for the sake of being moral than to be moral for reward. An amazingly high percentage of Christians have adopted this atheistic ethic. Unwittingly they are denying two fundamental truths of Christianity. First, God’s existence and second human responsibility. These two go together. Apart from God’s existence there is no true human responsibility. Either God is there and humans are responsible or God is not there and humans are not responsible. To be responsible there must be a person there to whom we are ultimately accountable. So, if God is not there then there is no ultimate day of reckoning. And that is precisely what the Atheist says. So, I would implore you not to hold to the concept that doing good works for reward is sinful. It’s precisely the other way around. Further what we unwittingly demonstrate is that we don’t really understand the Father-child relationship that is entered between God and the believer at the moment of faith alone in Christ alone. If we did we would expect and live in light of the day when we will face our Father. Further, if the child of the Father matures into a son of the Father the Father will reward the son. This is only natural and corresponds to earthly fathers and sons. God enjoys rewarding his faithful sons in the same way an earthy father enjoys rewarding a faithful son. Another reason God rewards is because whatever rewards we receive will then be used to bring greater glory to God for all eternity! So, He has a doxological purpose for rewards, the glory of God. So, is it wrong to strive for rewards? No, Paul commanded it, Paul did it, there’s nothing wrong with it so get over it and put worldly philosophies behind.

Now, let's pick up with the first reward promised in Revelation because Rev 22:12 highlighted the fact that when Christ returns His reward is with Him. While this verse may refer to judgment in general I'm going to talk about rewards at the judgment seat of Christ which is for all church age believers (Pentecost to the Rapture).

Tree of Life (Revelation 2:7)

The first reward is related to food. If you like food then you will love eating from the tree of life. Eating of the tree of life is a reward for those who are victorious over some specific trial.

Revelation 2:7 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.'

The problem at Ephesus is highlighted in verse 4; they had left their first love. Christ's solution is given in verse 5; if they remembered, repented and did the deeds they did at first they would be rewarded with freedom to eat from the tree of life. Verse 7 says this tree is located in "the Paradise of God". The Paradise of God seems to be the new Jerusalem in heaven. The archetype of the tree of life placed in the Garden of Eden was in this heavenly Paradise (Genesis 2:9; 3:17, 22, 24). Later, when the Tabernacle was built it contained the Menorah or Golden Lampstand (Exodus 25:31ff) which some think symbolized the tree of life.ⁱ In the NT, Jesus told the thief on the cross who believed in him "today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). Paul said he knew of a man who "was caught up into Paradise" (2 Corinthians 12:4). Thus, the "paradise of God" is presently in heaven and refers to the new Jerusalem. In the future creation this city will descend to rest on the new earth. Inside this city is the tree of life. If there is time between the judgment seat of Christ and the Millennial Kingdom then overcomers may eat of the tree of life then as well as when the new Jerusalem descends to the new earth and remains forever. The choice fruit of this tree will taste wonderful and will be energizing. It will certainly provide a heightened enjoyment of life forever.

Crown of Life (James 1:12; Revelation 2:10)

The second reward is related to a heightened quality of eternal life that will be enjoyed by those who have persevered under trial and/or have been martyred for Christ. The crown of life is mentioned as a reward in two passages.

James 1:12 Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him.

Here the crown of life is promised for those believers who persevere under trial. We all face trials and if we persevere then we will be approved at the judgment seat of Christ and will receive the crown of life. It is added that this crown is promised by the Lord to those who love Him. Jesus used this same word for “love” in John 14:15, 23 where He said “If you love Me you will keep My commandments.” Therefore, it is the man who obeys His commandments in the midst of trial who loves Him and as a result will receive the crown of life. It is when we face trials that we are most likely to abandon Him, particularly when our connection with Christ is a stigma and only inducing further persecution or difficulty. An example of this is given in our second passage, Revelation 2:10.

Revelation 2:10 ‘Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Some from this church were going to suffer by being cast into prison where they would have ten days of tribulation, persecution. The Lord exhorts them to “Be faithful until death”, that is, persevere in obedience through this trial. As a result they would be richly rewarded with “the crown of life.” The key to receiving “the crown of life” is persevering in obedience through trials. This demonstrates that we love Him. The crown of life is the reward.

The crown here is a *stephanos* crown. This crown was a victory wreath or garland that was graced upon the head of one who was victorious in an athletic contest. Here it refers to a higher quality of life that will be enjoyed by the one who perseveres.

Not Hurt By Second Death (Revelation 2:11)

This reward is related to the quality of eternal life the martyr will enjoy. It is possible that this odd promise is connected with Rev 21:8.

Revelation 2:11 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.’

Some have argued that this is a litotes which is a figure of speech denoting the extreme opposite. Surely a believer who is faithful to the point of death will be far from the second death because he will be enjoying a high quality of life! Others have noted a connection with Rev 21:8 where it says “their part will be in the lake of fire which is the second death”. If this refers to their inheritance as the context seems to suggest then this would be separation from one’s experiential inheritance due to failure to advance spiritually and persevere. Either way those who are martyred for their faithfulness to Christ will be rewarded with a fuller enjoyment of eternal life.

Hidden Manna (Revelation 2:17)

This reward is related to food like the tree of life and is related to being victorious over false teaching by taking a stand against it.

Revelation 2:17 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give *some* of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.’

Three rewards are actually promised to the overcomer here. The problem was that the believers of this church were compromising with false teaching. The false teaching that some held to was the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitan sect. The believers were too afraid to stand up to this false teaching and correct it. If no one stood against false teaching then eventually the church would lose all ability to spread forth the light of truth. Christ challenges them to repent about permitting this false teaching that subtly leads people astray. If they were obedient they would receive three rewards.

The first reward is “hidden manna”. This is another food related reward. In the Hebrew this word means “What is it?” It was a flake type pastry like baklava that God supernaturally gave the Israelites during the 40 years of wilderness wandering (Exodus 16:31ff). John 6:31 states that this “bread” came “out of heaven”. Thus, when we get to heaven those who have overcome will receive some of this hidden manna. This will be like walking into the bakery itself and getting it fresh out of the oven. This food will also be present in the new Jerusalem. So, if you ever wondered what the manna the Israelites ate tasted like you may get your chance to have some. It will certainly be a delightful treat.

A White Stone (Revelation 2:17)

The second reward mentioned here is “a white stone”. The white stone is related to being victorious over false teaching by standing against it. The background for this reward is probably the Greek athletic games. A victor in athletic games would often receive a monetary gift such as gold. In addition he also received a certificate of victory. This certificate “was a small tablet of white stone” on which his name would be inscribed by an expert carver.ⁱⁱ This stone certificate was often used to admit the competitor to the next athletic event on his way to the Olympic Games. Just as a victor in athletic games received the certificate of a white stone so also the victor in the Christian life who stands up against false teaching will receive the certificate of a white stone. This white stone may serve as one’s admission ticket into the gates of the new Jerusalem where he can eat of the tree of life and be in close proximity to the Lamb.

A New Name (Revelation 2:17)

The third reward mentioned here is “a new name”. The new name is also related to being victorious over false teaching by standing against it. This name is a secret name known only by Christ and the overcomer. In honor of this believer the new name will be inscribed on his white stone. A name was very important in Jewish thought. Often a new name is assigned to a person that reflects or characterizes his/her life. For example, Saul preferred to be called “Paul” because it means “little” and reminded him that he was the least of the apostles and the chiefest of sinners. James was called “camel knees” because of the callousness which had built up on his knees from

persevering praying. Christ himself inherited a new name because he was humbly obedient to the point of death on a cross (Philippians 2: 8-9; Hebrews 4:4; Revelation 3:12). If we overcome as Christ overcame, by humble obedience to the Fathers' will, we will also be rewarded with a new name. This name will be inscribed on a white stone.

What will this new name be? Each overcomer "has his own particular life message, his own particular history of struggle and demonstration of Gods life in his. God is a God of the individual as well as of the church."ⁱⁱⁱ Whatever name is issued it will be a name that summarizes that particular believer's life. Having it etched on a white stone will memorialize the overcomer's reputation for all eternity. However it is kept secret because it is a special thing that the overcomer shares exclusively with the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Means of Faithful Obedience

As you can see there are many and varied rewards that will heighten the believer's enjoyment of his eternal life in the Millennium and the new heaven and earth. Yet, rewards are not guaranteed by virtue of faith alone in Christ alone. Some genuine believer's will "suffer loss" at the judgment seat of Christ and enter the kingdom and new heaven and earth without any rewards. John says they will "shrink away in shame at His coming". In all this we have to remember that God has given each believer spiritual assets which He expects us to use now for His glory then. To hide our lamp under a bushel, so to speak, is to act wickedly and lazily with the abundant spiritual assets He has graciously given us. Nevertheless, all will have a full cup of joy in the new heaven and earth. No one will be lacking for joy only there will be different degrees of joy experienced.

Also we have to remember that the things that are rewardable are those things which are accomplished by faithful obedience to His commandments while submitting to the leadership of the Holy Spirit in our lives. He is constantly leading us but we can quench His leading in our lives. While justification is solely an operation of God experiential sanctification occurs by the cooperation of God and man. On one hand we are to work out our own salvation (Phil 2:12; also James 4:8a). On the other, God is at work in us both to will and to do (Phil 2:13; also James 4:8a). The explanation of these statements is that it is by grace alone. God has graciously given all believers

the ability to walk either by faith or by sight, to draw near to Him or not. He is always willing but we are not. The choice is up to you. You can choose to befriend the world or become the “friend of God”. Those who befriend the world will suffer loss at the judgment seat of Christ and those who become the friend of God will reap a wealth and diversity of rewards which can then be used to glorify and serve the everlasting King!

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter,
Fear God and keep His commandments,
For this is the whole duty of man
For God will bring every work into judgment,
Including every secret thing,
Whether it is good or whether it is evil.
- Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

Are you ready for His any-moment coming?

ⁱ See Randall Price, *The Temple and Bible Prophecy*.

ⁱⁱ Joseph Dillow, *Reign of the Servant Kings*, 483.

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