

Session 2 Understanding Eternal Rewards: Biblical Principles (Pt. 1)

I. REVIEW

- A. Each person will stand before Jesus to give an account of themselves and to receive rewards. The judgment seat, *bema*, was a familiar term at the time of the early church; it referred to the platform where a judge sat to evaluate athletic contests and give awards, like in the Olympic Games today.

¹⁰For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. (2 Cor. 5:10)

- B. What we do with our time, money, deeds, and words really matters. Being faithful to God involves much more than spending time in prayer with fasting. For example, the endless tasks that a mother does in serving her family many hours a day matter to the Lord. Knowing that our menial tasks matter gives value to our life. Life doesn't make sense if what we do doesn't have lasting value.
- C. The centerpiece of God's eternal purpose is for Jesus to return to fully establish His kingdom rule over all the earth and join the heavenly and earthly realms together (Eph. 1:9-10). If we do not think rightly about heaven, we will rarely think about heaven at all.

⁹...made known to us the mystery [hidden plan] of His will... ¹⁰that He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth. (Eph. 1:9-10)

1. ***Heaven*** speaks of the supernatural realm, where God's power is openly manifested.
 2. ***Earth*** speaks of the physical realm as the place where human process and physical sensations reach their fullest expression.
- D. Jesus gave over 50 references to eternal rewards, making it one of His most emphasized themes (Mt. 5:5, 12, 19; 6:4, 6, 18, 20; 10:41-42; 16:27; 18:4; 19:21, 28, 30; 20:26-27; 23:12; 25:21, 23; Mk. 9:41; 10:21, 43-44; Lk. 6:23, 35; 9:48; 12:8; 21, 33; 14:11; 16:11; 18:14, 22; 19:17, 19; 22:30; Jn. 12:26; Rev. 2:7, 10-11, 17, 26-27; 3:4-5, 11-12, 18, 21; 16:15; 19:7-8; 20:4, 6; 22:5, 12).
- E. Jesus taught on eternal rewards, calling His people to become ***great*** (Mt. 5:19; 18:4; 20:26; 23:11; Mk. 10:43; Lk. 6:23, 35; 9:48); to receive ***rewards*** (Mt. 5:12; 6:4, 6, 18; 10:41-42; 16:27; Mk. 9:41; Lk. 6:23, 35; Rev. 22:12); to gain ***riches*** (Lk. 12:21; 16:11; Rev. 2:9; 3:18) and ***treasure*** in heaven (Mt. 6:20; 19:21; Mk. 10:21; Lk. 12:33; 18:22); to be ***ruler*** over much (Mt. 25:21; 23); to have ***authority*** over cities (Lk. 19:17, 19), ***power*** over nations (Rev. 2:26-27) and in society (Mt. 5:5); to sit on ***thrones*** (Mt. 19:28; Lk. 22:30; Rev. 3:21; 20:4, 6; 22:5); to gain ***crowns*** (Rev. 2:10; 3:11) and heavenly ***garments*** (Rev. 3:4-5, 18; 16:15; 19:7-8); to be ***exalted*** (Mt. 23:12; Lk. 14:11; 18:14) and receive ***honor*** from God (Jn. 12:26); and to be ***first*** in receiving blessing (Mt. 19:30; 20:26-27).
- F. We are not left guessing as to what God considers ***first and greatest***. Loving God with all of our heart is the ***first*** emphasis of the Spirit in our lives, and it is the ***greatest*** calling on anyone's life. The primary success and greatness in anyone's life is found in walking in the grace to love God.

³⁷You shall love the LORD... ³⁸This is the first and great commandment. (Mt. 22:37-38)

II. WHY BELIEVERS SHOULD DESIRE ETERNAL REWARDS

- A. **Love:** Rewards are about Jesus expressing how He feels about the way we loved Him in this life. He delights in making known how He feels about the way you lived. We will have great joy in hearing His affirmation of our love. He wants us to know that our choices did not go unnoticed.
⁵*The Lord comes...then each one's praise [affirmation] will come from God. (1 Cor. 4:5)*
- B. **Partnership:** Rewards are about working in close proximity to Jesus as He reigns over the earth. He desires that His Bride be with Him to reign with Him in deep partnership (Jn. 17:24; Rev. 3:21).
²⁴*“Father, I desire that they...may be with Me where I am.” (Jn. 17:24)*
²¹*“To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne.” (Rev. 3:21)*
1. Believers will work in varying proximity to Jesus in the Millennium depending in part on the measure of responsibilities with which they are entrusted. The greater the sphere of authority one has, the more interaction will be necessary. We see this principle employed in the different ways Jesus interacted with people during His earthly ministry. For example, He related differently to the 3, the 12, the 70, the 120, and the multitudes.
 2. Jesus’ physical body in the age to come will be *in only one place at a time*. By the Spirit we will all have communication with Him, feel His presence, and know His heart. Jesus has two natures—He is fully God and fully man—known as the *hypostatic union*. He is omnipresent in His deity—always with us. But He can only be in one place at a time in His physical body.
- C. **Righteousness:** Rewards are about the Lord celebrating our choices for righteousness. He loves righteousness (Heb. 1:9), and His name is Righteousness (Jer. 23:6); thus, He celebrates even our smallest acts of righteousness. He manifests His zeal over them because His nature is righteous.
⁹*You have loved righteousness...therefore God...has anointed You with...gladness. (Heb. 1:9)*
- D. **Truth:** Rewards are about the truth concerning our love and obedience being openly manifested. Because God is love (1 Jn. 4:16) and Jesus is “the truth” (Jn. 14:6), whatever is true about how we loved Him will come to light in His presence. The Man who is “the Truth” vindicates the truth about how His people love Him. It is in His nature to bring our choices for love to light.
- E. **Joy:** The saints will have joy in working closely with Jesus in reigning with Him (Mt. 25:21) and in His affirmation of our love. There will be no competition or envy since all will be preoccupied with Jesus’ beauty and gratitude. Some claim not to care about rewards, but this not a biblical mindset.
²¹*“I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord.” (Mt. 25:21)*
- F. **Secular paradigm:** Rewards are not about gaining superiority or status before others. Jesus called us to reject a secular paradigm full of pride that seeks honor and authority to lord it over people (Mt. 20:25). However, He also validated the desire to be great (Mt. 20:26).
²⁵*But Jesus...said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them...”²⁶*Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great...let him be your servant.” (Mt. 20:25-26)**

III. PRINCIPLE #1: ETERNAL REWARDS ARE EXPRESSIONS OF GRACE

- A. We do not earn rewards. The rewards we receive are far greater than anything we could ever deserve. Jesus “pays” so well though we do so little (Mt. 10:42; 25:21; Lk. 19:17). Jesus can afford to be extravagant with heavenly rewards because He is so rich; He greatly enjoys His people and wants to express it. He is the wealthiest, kindest, and most generous Man ever to live.

²¹*“Well done...you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things.” (Mt. 25:21)*

¹⁷*“Well done...because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.” (Lk. 19:17)*

- B. We can never out-give Jesus. We take one step of obedience and receive a mile of blessing.

³⁸*Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down...and running over. (Lk. 6:38)*

²⁹*Everyone who has left...lands for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold... (Mt. 19:29)*

- C. Jesus is the ultimate “cheerful giver” who rewards His people generously (2 Cor. 9:6-7). He relates to us according to the “riches of His glory” (Rom. 9:23; Eph. 1:18; 3:16; Phil. 4:19; Col. 1:27).

⁶*...he who sows...will also reap bountifully...⁷for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Cor. 9:6-7)*

²³*...that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy. (Rom. 9:23)*

¹⁸*...that you may know...what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. (Eph. 1:18)*

- D. Jesus judges His people graciously according to the “law of liberty” (Jas. 2:12).

¹²*So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. (Jas. 2:12)*

IV. PRINCIPLE #2: ETERNAL REWARDS ARE GIVEN ACCORDING TO WORKS

- A. Jesus specifically used the word “reward” (Mt. 5:12, 46; 6:4, 6, 18; 10:41-42; 16:27; Mk. 9:41; Lk. 6:23, 35; Rev. 22:12; cf. Isa. 40:10; 62:11) and the phrase “according to his works” (Mt. 16:27; Rev. 22:12); He even said that some would be “repaid” in the resurrection (Lk. 14:14).

²⁷*The Son of Man will come...then He will reward each according to his works. (Mt. 16:27)*

¹²*“I am coming...My reward is with Me to give to every one according to his work.” (Rev. 22:12)*

¹³*But when you give a feast, invite the poor...the lame, the blind. ¹⁴And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection. (Lk. 14:13-14)*

¹²*Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Mt. 5:12)*

³⁵*Love your enemies, do good...and your reward will be great. (Lk. 6:35)*

- B. We are rewarded for our acts of righteousness done in this age (Rev. 19:8). Our works include our actions, words, and how we spend our time and money and care for our families and others.
- ⁸***To her [Bride] it was granted to be arrayed...for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. (Rev. 19:8)***
- ⁸***Each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor [work]...¹⁴If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. (1 Cor. 3:8, 14)***
- C. Faith without “works” is considered to be “dead faith” (Jas. 2:17-18, 20, 22, 26). We are saved as a gift by faith in Jesus’ work, but we are rewarded according to our works. Our entrance into heaven is not based on our works, but our role in heaven is. Some misunderstand the value of their works; since no one can be saved by their works, they falsely conclude that their works do not matter.
- ¹⁷***Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead...¹⁸I will show you my faith by my works....²²Do you see that faith was working together with his [Abraham's] works, and by works faith was made perfect? ...²⁶so faith without works is dead also. (Jas. 2:17-26)***
- D. Our words will be evaluated on the last day since they reveal our heart (Mt. 10:32; 12:36-37).
- ³⁶***For every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. ³⁷For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned. (Mt. 12:36-37)***
- ³²***Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father. (Mt. 10:32)***
- E. Jesus promised the apostles that they would sit on thrones in the millennial kingdom because of their obedience (Mt. 19:28; Lk. 22:29-30). Not all believers will have governmental positions.
- ²⁷***“We [the apostles] have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?” ²⁸Jesus said to them, “...when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Mt. 19:27-28)***
- F. Our works include small deeds (Lk. 19:17; 16:10-12; cf. Mt. 10:42; 25:21; 20:26-27; Heb. 6:10). Our faithfulness is manifested in our life choices—99% of our godly choices and deeds are small. Our works include the small things that we do—speaking kind words, small attitude adjustments, little acts of service (in our family), and sacrificially giving small amounts of money (Lk. 21:1-4).
- ¹⁷***Because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities. (Lk. 19:17)***
- G. Jesus remembers every small act of love, even giving a cup of water (Mt. 10:42). Every deed that we do is seen and rewarded by God, no matter how unnoticed it is by men (Heb. 6:10).
- ⁴²***And whoever gives...only a cup of cold water...he shall by no means lose his reward. (Mt. 10:42)***
- ¹⁰***God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints. (Heb. 6:10)***
- H. Our works include the secret intentions of our heart to love and obey God (Rom. 2:16; 1 Cor. 4:5).

V. PRINCIPLE #3: ALL OF OUR WORKS ARE WRITTEN IN GOD’S BOOKS

- A. The works of human beings are important and have a lasting impact—so much so that God keeps detailed records of what each person does (Dan. 7:10; cf. Ps. 69:28; 87:6; 139:16; Rev. 20:12).

¹⁰*...the court [in heaven] was seated, and the books were opened. (Dan. 7:10)*

- B. God’s books contain the names and actions of all believers (Dan. 12:1; Phil. 4:3; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12; 21:27), even their conversations (Mal. 3:16; Mt. 12:35-37).

¹⁶*Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; So a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD.* (Mal. 3:16)

VI. PRINCIPLE #4: THERE ARE MANY TYPES OF ETERNAL REWARDS

- A. In Revelation 2-3, Jesus highlighted 18 different rewards. I put these 18 promises in 8 categories: receiving heavenly garments (Rev. 3:5, 18), reigning with authority (Rev. 2:26; 3:12, 21), receiving a crown, or jewels, to honor one’s obedience (Rev. 2:10, 17), the story of one’s loving devotion to Jesus being made known (Rev. 2:17; 3:5), receiving heavenly treasure (Rev. 2:11; 3:18), receiving a spirit of revelation to encounter God with greater capacity (Rev. 2:28; 3:12, 18, 20), dining with Jesus (Rev. 2:7, 17), being vindicated before one’s enemies (Rev. 3:9).

- B. In the same way that there is a great variety of gifts, ministries, and activities in the Body of Christ in this age, so there will be great diversity in the age to come (1 Cor. 12:4-6, 11, 18-19).

⁴*There are diversities of gifts...⁵There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. ⁶And there are diversities of activities...¹¹The same Spirit...distributing to each one individually...*

¹⁸*God has set the members, each one of them, in the body as He pleased. (1 Cor. 12:4-18)*

VII. PRINCIPLE #5: ETERNAL REWARDS ARE GLORIOUS

- A. Paul gave us a grid for understanding eternal rewards (1 Cor. 2:9). They are spectacular and far more glorious than anyone imagines—exceedingly abundantly beyond what we think (Eph. 3:20).

⁹*“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”¹⁰But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. (1 Cor. 2:9-10)*

²⁰*To Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think... (Eph. 3:20)*

¹⁷*...affliction...is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. (2 Cor. 4:17)*

- B. God is the architect of the New Jerusalem, an example of His spectacular creativity. Since He never changes, we can assume that eternal rewards will be spectacular, commensurate with the glory of the New Jerusalem and our resurrected body that is conformed to Jesus’ body (Phil. 3:21). We must not reduce our understanding of His heavenly rewards to something we can easily imagine.

²*His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. (Mt. 17:2)*

⁴³*The righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. (Mt. 13:43)*

VIII. PRINCIPLE #6: COMPARING SCRIPTURE WITH SCRIPTURE TO GAIN INSIGHT

- A. We compare Scripture with Scripture to gain insight into the possible implications of the glorious nature of various eternal rewards. Jesus gave simple descriptions of each reward, knowing that more insight could be gained by searching the Scriptures for parallel passages.
- B. The priestly garments that God designed give insight into His creative abilities related to garments. God designed them to be beautiful and to show both His glory and the dignity of the priesthood. An “elaborate crown” was put on Joshua the high priest; it also points to God’s creative abilities to design crowns with beauty and confer honor and authority on His servants (Zech. 6:11-14).
²*“You shall make holy garments for Aaron [high priest]... for glory and for beauty.” (Ex. 28:2)*
- C. The Scripture tells us that the rich man in Hades had a meaningful conversation with Abraham and that he remembered his family members on earth, etc. (Lk. 16:23-28).
²³*And being in torments in Hades, he [the rich man]...saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom...²⁵Abraham said, “Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things...”
²⁷Then he said, “I beg...that you would send him to my father’s house, ²⁸*for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.” (Lk. 16:23-28)**
- D. We gain insight into eternal rewards by seeing what the Scripture says about God’s leadership over the angelic realm. Angels have varying roles, capacities, and degrees of glory in their garments.
¹*I saw another angel...having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. (Rev. 18:1)*
⁶*...clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands. (Rev. 15:6)*

IX. PRINCIPLE #7: GAINING INSIGHT FROM THE NATURAL REALM

- A. We gain insight into implications of the glorious nature of various eternal rewards by observing aspects of our natural life that God declared as “very good” (Gen. 1:31) and that correspond to our spiritual life (1 Cor. 15:46). In Jesus’ resurrection, His body, clothing, speech, food, and travel have some correspondence to earthly life. In the resurrection, our five senses will function in a similar way to now, yet enhanced by the power of the Spirit.
²⁶*God said, “Let Us make man in Our image...let them have dominion over...all the earth...”
³¹*God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. (Gen. 1:26-31)*
⁴⁶*However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. (1 Cor. 15:46)**
- B. For example, I believe we will continue to learn, remember, teach, establish new relationships, sing, play musical instruments, etc. In this age there are garments for different occasions, so I assume there will also be many different garments for different occasions in the age to come.
- C. We get a glimpse of God’s glory in the vastness, beauty, and diversity of creation (Ps. 19:1).
¹*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. (Ps. 19:1)*