

What Exactly Are Our Heavenly Rewards Anyway?

Isn't it amazing that those who have surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior will not only go to heaven, but will be rewarded for things that they've done for Christ (subject to conditions that only God knows—possibly things like: what our heart motivation was for doing them; what we did for His glory rather than our own; what we did by His leading and power, and so on)?

In other cases, intended rewards might be lost due to matters such as: inattention to the subject, doubts and fears about the character of God, a greater love for worldly things, sloth, unbelief and so on.

In Matthew 6:19-21, Christ exhorted believers to “store up treasures in heaven”—not the treasures of earth. In Galatians 6:9-10, the apostle Paul speaks of the harvest that we will reap if we do not give up doing good.

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, so that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

Christians surely want to know what is going to happen to them when they stand before Jesus during the final judgment—a judgment of condemnation for those who have not given their life to Christ, but for believers, a judgment concerning the rewards (or lack thereof) that they will receive in heaven for how they lived their life after they were saved.

What are Rewards Anyway?

Might they include an ongoing, closer proximity to the Lord or perhaps greater positions of responsibility? And are the rewards the same as the crowns that will be awarded?

Notice that the criteria for some of the *rewards* are the same as for some of the *crowns*. By that, one could make the case that *crowns* and *rewards* are the same thing. However, it is more likely that crowns and rewards *would* share criteria, though being different.

Why would God not tell us what they are and how to get them? The answer may be the same as to why He doesn't tell us many other things this side of heaven. Perhaps in the not knowing, we become motivated to give more attention to the matter.

Perhaps God's silence is meant to encourage us to follow the example of the apostle Paul, who wrote about pressing on "to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me ... to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward" (Phil. 3:12-14, NIV). The King James Version refers to it as "the high calling of God."

As fallen creatures, our set point is to manipulate people—even God, (if that were possible)! If He were to reveal all the criteria for receiving rewards, our tendency might be to perform such criteria as a way of manipulating God's decision rather than being motivated to do so by a genuine love for Him.

It's like when a child cleans up their act just before Christmas as a way of maneuvering his/her parents into being positively disposed toward giving them everything they want. Once again, the focus is on the rewards rather than the one who rewards.

A Biblical Summary Chart About "Rewards"

Condition: saving faith

Reward: God Himself (Gen. 15:1)

Condition: keeping God's statutes

Reward: a great reward (Ps. 19:21)

Condition: according to what we have done (our conduct) – or what our deeds deserve

Reward: an unnamed reward (Ps. 62:12; Jer. 17:10b, 32:19b; Matt. 16:27; Rev. 22:12)

Condition: sowing righteousness

Reward: a sure reward (Prov. 11:18)

Condition: being kind to the poor

Reward: an unnamed reward (Prov. 19:17, 25:22)

Condition: being persecuted because of Him

Reward: a great reward (Matt. 5:12, 6:1,5)

Condition: welcoming true prophets or righteous men

Reward: an unnamed reward (Matt. 10:41)

Condition: doing acts of righteousness for the praise of God rather than men

Reward: an unnamed reward (Matt. 6:1)

Condition: loving our enemies, lending to them and doing good to them without expecting anything in return

Reward: a great reward (Luke 6:35)

Condition: actions that are found to be of good quality in God's sight

Reward: an unnamed reward (1 Cor. 3:8, 12-15)

Condition: doing good wholeheartedly

Reward: an unnamed reward (Col. 3:23)

Condition: standing our ground during persecution and suffering with confident perseverance

Reward: an unnamed reward (Heb. 10:32-39)

Condition: choosing to suffer mistreatment for God's sake

Reward: an unnamed reward (Heb. 11:6)

Condition: faithfully continuing in the teaching of Christ

Reward: rewarded fully (2 John 8-9)

A Biblical Summary Chart About "Crowns"

Condition: for those who delight the Lord by being humble

Crown: a crown of salvation (Ps. 149:4)

Condition: for those who esteem wisdom

Crown: a crown of splendor (Prov. 4:9)

Condition: for those who lead a righteous life

Crown: a crown of blessing (Prov. 10:6)

Condition: for the ransomed of the Lord who walk in the way of holiness

Crown: a crown of everlasting gladness (Isa. 35:10, 51:11)

Condition: the poor, brokenhearted, captives/prisoners, mourners who are oaks of righteousness

Crown: a crown of beauty (Isa. 61:3)

Condition: those who compete (for the sake of the gospel) in the game (of serving the Lord) after strict training

Crown: a crown that will last forever (1 Cor. 9:25)

Condition: those who act like a "brother" to other believers

Crown: a crown of joy (Phil. 4:1, 1 Thess. 2:19)

Condition: for those who have “fought the good fight, finished the race and kept the faith,” as well as for “all who have longed for His appearing”

Crown: a crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8)

Condition: those who have persevered under trial and stood the test

Crown: the crown of life (James 1:12)

Condition: for those who have remained faithful *unto death* during trials and persecutions

Crown: the crown of life (Rev. 2:10)

Condition: those church elders who have been faithful as godly examples over their flock

Crown: an unfading crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:4)

Condition: the elders (the heads of the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles) who are seated before the throne of God

Crown: crowns of gold (Rev. 4:4)

Running the Race

In 2 Timothy 2:5, the apostle Paul gives an example of an athlete, who after having endured hardship and running the race according to the rules, receives a “victor’s crown.” Then in verse 12, he completes the thought by saying “if we endure, we will also reign with Him (Jesus).”

The purpose of at least one of the crowns is for “reigning with Him.” This may be related to Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 6:2-3 that at least some of us will judge the world—even angels.

Why Cast our Crowns Before Him?

In his vision of the throne room of heaven, the apostle John sees 24 elders falling down before God in worship, casting their crowns before Him (Rev. 4:10).

The scene is picked up by songwriter Reginald Heber in one of the greatest hymns of all time—"Holy, Holy, Holy!" In one line, he writes:

Holy, Holy, Holy!/ All the saints adore Thee/ Casting down their golden crowns/ Around the crystal sea.

There are at least two possible reasons why we will cast our crowns before Jesus:

1. **According to Colossians 1:18, Jesus is our head and we are His body, so that in everything He might have supremacy.** Thus, all that we have done in righteousness will have been done by Him by means of His guidance, power and inspiration. *He is the source of our crowns, even those He bestows upon us.*
2. **Similarly, as God of glory and Creator of all that is (Col. 1:15-16; Eph. 3:9; Rev. 4:11, 10:6), He deserves the glory for it all.** Casting our crowns before Him is an acknowledgement that ultimately God alone is the source of all that is praiseworthy.

It wouldn't surprise me, however, that based on His unfathomable generosity, once we have cast our crowns before Him, He will return them to us.

In Revelation 3:11, Jesus says that for those who have endured persecutions patiently and have thereby overcome them, "I will keep (them) from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth." He then indicates that for having thus held on to what they have, their crown will not be taken away from them.

Crown Him With Many Crowns

In his vision, the apostle John saw in heaven, “one like the son of man” (a Messianic title used by Jesus) seated on a cloud, with a crown of gold on His head (Rev. 14:14; see also Mark 8:31, 14:62; Rev. 1:13; Dan. 7:13-14).

Similarly, in Revelation 19:12, Jesus is described as having eyes like blazing fire, with many crowns on His head.

The rewards and crowns that we receive upon meeting the Lord will be ours for all eternity. Though you may have earned them on earth, they are gifts of loving gratitude, shared by the one who made it possible to earn them—the glorious one from whom comes everything (1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16-20; Rom. 11:35-36).

In 1852, Matthew Bridges paid tribute to this fact by penning the hymn, “Crown Him with Many Crowns.” In praise of the King of Kings—our Lord Jesus Christ—let us meditate on his words:

*Crown Him with many crowns/
The Lamb upon His throne/
Hark! how the heav’nly anthem drowns/
All music but its own/
Awake, my soul, and sing/
Of Him who died for thee/
And hail Him as thy matchless King/
Through all eternity. {eoa}*

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