

What The Bible Teaches About Rewards For & Judgment Of Believers

“After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.”
[Genesis 15:1]

Introduction

So, just what exactly does the Bible teach about rewards for believers in heaven? There are two major schools of thought on this subject. One teaches that believers will receive some kind of physical rewards (literal crowns) in heaven based on their works done as Christians. The second school of thought teaches that the heavenly reward of believers is salvation alone, eternal life alone. Based on a comparison of scripture with scripture, the author leans towards the second opinion. However, this study does not conclusively prove the second opinion.

How are rewards described in scripture?

The Bible calls our reward an ***inheritance*** and it calls believers ***joint-heirs*** with Christ:

Col 3:23-24 - “23 And whatsoever ye do, do *it* heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; 24 Knowing that of the Lord **ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance**: for ye serve the Lord Christ.”

Hebrews 1:1-2 - “1 God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, 2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed **heir of all things**, by whom also he made the worlds;”

Romans 8:17 - “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and **joint-heirs with Christ**; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together.”

Romans 8:32 - “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how **shall he not with him also freely give us all things?**”

So what do we inherit?

We inherit **all things**. Specifically, we inherit God Almighty and the privilege of fellowshiping with Him for all eternity:

Genesis 15:1 - "After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: **I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.**"

Matthew 19:29 - "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall **inherit everlasting life.**"

1John 2:25 - "And this is the promise that **he hath promised us, even eternal life.**"

What are the crowns the Bible speaks of?

Many people refer to the scriptures that mention 'crowns' when they speak of the rewards that believers are to receive in heaven. Here are the verses that speak of the types of crowns believers possess or will possess:

1Corinthians 9:25 - "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.**"

1Thessalonians 2:19a - "For what *is* our hope, or joy, or **crown of rejoicing**"

Timothy 4:8 - "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."

James 1:12 - "Blessed *is* the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the **crown of life**, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him."

1Peter 5:4 - "And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, **ye shall receive a crown of glory** that fadeth not away."

Revelation 2:10 - "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.**"

Revelation 4:4 - "And round about the throne *were* four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads **crowns of gold.**"

As we can see from the above verses, the crowns are of these types or characteristics:

1. Glory (1Peter 5:4)
2. Rejoicing (1 Thessalonians 2:19)
3. Life (James 1:12, Revelation 2:10)
4. Incorruptible (1 Corinthians 9:25)
5. Gold (Revelation 4:4)

The crown of glory:

1Peter 5:4 "And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a **crown of glory** that fadeth not away."

Isaiah 28:5 - "In that day shall **the LORD of hosts be for a crown of glory**, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people"

The above verse indicates that it is the Lord who is the believer's **crown of glory**. Now is this the same crown of glory mentioned in 1 Peter 5:4?

The crown of rejoicing:

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul refers to the Thessalonian believers as his **crown of rejoicing**.

1Thessalonians 2:19-20 - "For what *is* our hope, or joy, or **crown of rejoicing**? *Are* not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For **ye** are our glory and joy."

The crown of life:

Revelation 2:10 - "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.**"

Who is faithful unto death?

Those who have faith - the redeemed of the Lord, because their faith is in Christ and His completed work of salvation.

James 1:12 - "**Blessed is the man that endureth temptation:** for when he is tried, he shall receive **the crown of life**, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him."

Who is it that endures temptation?

Those who can say "greater is he that is in me than he that is in the world" (1John 4:4). If a crown of life is a reward that believers receive, a reward relating to life, we must ask the question "What reward, relating to life, do believers receive?" Some verses that may shed light on this question include:

John 11:25 - " Jesus said unto her, **I am the resurrection, and the life:** he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live"

Luke 18:28-30 - "28 Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee. 29 And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, **for the kingdom of God's sake**, 30 Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and **in the world to come life everlasting.**

1John 5:12 - "**He that hath the Son hath life;** and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."

Is eternal life the **crown of life**? It appears to be the case.

The incorruptible crown:

1Corinthians 9:25 - "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.**"

What **incorruptible rewards** do we find mentioned in the Bible? Our glorified bodies will be **incorruptible:**

1Corinthians 15:52 - "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last

trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised **incorruptible**, and we shall be changed.”

1Peter 1:4 - “To an inheritance **incorruptible**, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you”

1Peter 1:23 - “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of **incorruptible**, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.”

The crown of gold:

Revelation 4:4 - “And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads **crowns of gold.**”

True Christians possess a crown

Besides Revelation 4:4, there is one other place in the Bible that mentions a **crown of gold** that believers possess:

Psalm 21:1-5 - “1 <<To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.>> The king shall joy in thy strength, O LORD; and **in thy salvation how greatly shall he rejoice!** 2 Thou hast given him his heart’s desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips. Selah. 3 For thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness: **thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head.** 4 **He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him,** *even* length of days for ever and ever. 5 **His glory is great in thy salvation: honour and majesty hast thou laid upon him.**”

We know that we receive honour and majesty when God saves us from verse 5 above and from these verses in the book of Revelation:

Revelation 1:6 - “And hath made us **kings and priests unto God** and his Father; to him *be* glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

Revelation 5:10 - “And hast made us unto our God **kings and priests:** and we shall reign on the earth.”

The high priest wore a crown

We know from the book of Exodus, that the high priest in the tabernacle wore a gold crown:

Exodus 39:30 - "And they made the plate of the holy **crown of pure gold**, and wrote upon it a writing, *like to* the engravings of a signet, HOLINESS TO THE LORD."

We also know that Jesus is our high priest (Hebrews 6:20, 7:26, 8:1, 9:11, 10:21). These verses seem to be indicating that **the crown of gold** may represent salvation or the majesty and authority that we have positionally in Christ when we receive salvation (as noted above in Psalm 21:5).

What about the crowns the elders cast before God's throne?

Revelation 4:10-11 "10 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and **cast their crowns before the throne**, saying, 11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

The casting of the crowns before the throne may possibly represent the saints acknowledging that any glory that they have is from Christ and that He alone is their glory.

WE MUST NEVER FORGET THAT WE HAVE ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO GIVE TO GOD THAT HE DID NOT PROVIDE (1 Cor 4:7)...

1Corinthians 4:7 " For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"

Are there special rewards for suffering for Christ?

This verse seems to indicate that there will be rewards for suffering for

Christ:

2Corinthians 4:17 - "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory;"

But we must ask ourselves: "Do not all believers suffer for Christ?" ...

2Timothy 3:12 - "Yea, and **all** that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

Now we cannot say that not all believers "live godly in Christ". If you have a faith that does not produce any works, any godliness, then you are not IN CHRIST. (see James 2:18&26, Acts 26:20).

What treasures are we to store up for ourselves in heaven?

Matthew 6:19-20 - "19 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: 20 But lay up for yourselves **treasures in heaven**, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal"

2Corinthians 4:6-7 - " 6 For God, who commanded **the light** to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 7 But **we have this treasure in earthen vessels**, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."

Is **God** (the Holy Spirit) the treasure in earthen vessels? What is the "light" mentioned in verse 6? Is it Christ or is it the Gospel or perhaps something else? Several verses in scripture say that Jesus is "light":

John 8:12 - "Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, **I am the light of the world**: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

John 9:5 - "As long as I am in the world, **I am the light of the world.**"

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John 12:46 - "**I am come a light into the world**, that whosoever

believeth on me should not abide in darkness.”

This verse says that believers are “lights”:

Matthew 5:14 - “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.”

What makes a believer a light? Surely nothing in and of themselves...

Colossians 1:27 - “To whom God would make known what *is* the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is **Christ in you**, the hope of glory”

Philippians 2:13 - “For **it is God which worketh in you** both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure.”

So it would seem that **Christ in you** is that light and that treasure in earthen vessels.

What are the wages that the Bible is talking about in John chapter 4:

John 4:35-36 - “35 Say not ye, There are yet four months, and *then* cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. 36 And **he that reapeth receiveth wages**, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.”

Matthew 20:9-10 - “9 And when they came that *were hired* about the eleventh hour, **they received every man a penny**. 10 But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and **they likewise received every man a penny**.”

According to Matthew 20 above, all believers receive the same wages - **life everlasting**:

Galatians 6:8 - “For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap

corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit **reap life everlasting.**"

Psalm 126:6 - "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, **bringing his sheaves with him.**"

Are not the sheaves, the believers whom God saves through our seed sowing? ...

Matthew 13:37-40 - "37 He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; 38 The field is the world; the **good seed are the children of the kingdom**; but the tares are the children of the wicked *one*; 39 The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. 40 As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world."

What kind of attitude should we have about serving God?

We should realize that it is our duty to serve our Lord and God who alone is worthy of total obedience and uncompromising service:

Revelation 5:12 - "Saying with a loud voice, **Worthy is the Lamb** that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

Luke 17:9-10 - "9 Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. 10 So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, **We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.**"

We should also realize that we are no better than our other brothers and sisters in Christ. God may have gifted us more than others in some areas but we are all members of one body:

Romans 12:3 - "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, **not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think**; but to think soberly, **according as God hath dealt to every man** the measure of faith."

What happens when people focus on rewards instead of on Christ?

People who focus on rewards more than or instead of Christ, may not be saved. True Christians are to be content in all things (Php 4:11, 1 Tim 6:6).

Matthew 20:10-15 - "10 But when the first came, **they supposed that they should have received more**; and they likewise received every man a penny. 11 And when they had received *it*, they murmured against the goodman of the house, 12 Saying, These last have wrought *but* one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. 13 But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? 14 Take *that* thine *is*, and go thy way: **I will give unto this last, even as unto thee.** 15 Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?"

Matthew 18:1-4 - "1 At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, **Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?** 2 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, 3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

Mark 10:35-45 - "35 And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, **we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire.** 36 And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? 37 They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory. 38 But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? 39 And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: 40 But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but *it shall be given to them* for whom it is prepared. 41 And when the ten heard *it*, they began to be much displeased with James and John. 42 But Jesus called them *to him*, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. 43 But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: 44 And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. 45 For even **the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.**"

What does it mean to be ruler over many things?

Matthew 25:21 - "His lord said unto him, Well done, *thou* good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, **I will make thee ruler over many things**: enter thou into the joy of thy lord."

Some interpret the above phrase "I will make thee ruler over many things" to refer to ruling in heaven since the parable seems to be painting a picture of something that happens in the future when a person performs well in this life. Though I cannot conclusively prove it, I believe that the phrase "I will make thee ruler over many things" refers to the sanctification of believers, *in this present life*. When we are unsaved, sin reigns over us and preoccupies us, in fact it consumes us - permeating every aspect of our spiritually dead, sin-cursed bodies and minds. See John 8:34, Rom 7:5, 23, 1 Cor 6:12, Gal 5:17 as well as:

Romans 6:16-19 - "16 Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? 17 But God be thanked, that **ye were the servants of sin**, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. 18 Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. 19 I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness."

To grow and mature in Christ, we must grow in our knowledge of His Word and His will. This means that we will develop, by the grace of God, an increased awareness and sensitivity to sin, to the things that displease the Lord, as we study the Bible and put it into practice. So as time goes on, each and every true believer should be delivered from the habits of the old way of life and begin to reign over those habits rather than those habits controlling the believer:

Romans 6:12-14 - "12 Let not sin therefore **reign** in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. 13 Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. 14 For **sin shall not have dominion over you**: for ye are not under the law, but under grace."

So the statement “I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” relates to the joy that every believer enters into when they become saved – the joy they have in ruling over sin in their lives, sin that in the past ruled over them. They will be transformed, by the renewing of their mind (Rom 12:2), into people who no longer think that it is an abomination to depart from evil (Prov 13:19). Instead, they will have the attitude of the psalmist when he wrote:

Psalm 40:8 – “I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law *is* within my heart.”

What rewards can we expect in this life and in the life to come?

We can expect God to give us **many brothers and sisters in Christ** to make up for the members of our families who forsake us because of our faith in Christ. And we can expect to receive eternal life in glory with the Lord in the life to come:

Mark 10:30 – “But he shall receive an hundredfold now **in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands**, with persecutions; and **in the world to come eternal life.**”

Did Paul preach the Gospel for rewards or out of necessity?

1 Corinthians 9:16-18 – “16 For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: **for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!** 17 For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation *of the gospel* is committed unto me. 18 What is my reward then? *Verily* that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel.”

What should be our motivation for serving Christ?
Should we serve Christ for rewards? For fear of punishment? Or out of love?
The Bible says our motivation should be love:

Romans 6:17-18 – “17 But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of

sin, but ye have **obeyed from the heart** that form of doctrine which was delivered you. 18 Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.”

1John 4:18 - “There is no fear in love; but perfect **love** casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.”

John 14:15 - “If ye **love** me, keep my commandments.”

Psalm 119:127 - “Therefore I **love** thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold.”

If we serve Christ out of love, should it be a love of rewards or a love of Christ?

But what about the judgment seat of Christ?

Romans 14:10 - “But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before **the judgment seat of Christ.**”

Let’s look at the above verse in context and determine exactly what is being said:

Romans 14:10-14 - “But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before **the judgment seat of Christ.** 11 For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. 12 So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. 13 **Let us not therefore judge one another any more:** but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in *his* brother’s way. 14 I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that *there is* nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him *it is* unclean.”

Verse 13 indicates that passage is focusing on being judgmental towards other believers with respect to things about which there is Christian liberty. But at the same time, we should be sure that in our Christian liberty, we are not causing a brother to stumble (see also verses 15-21 in Romans 14).

What about 2 Corinthians 5:10? That speaks of a judgment seat:

2Corinthians 5:10 - “For we must all appear before **the judgment seat of Christ;** that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad.”

We need to look at that in context also. What does the very next verse say?

2Corinthians 5:11 - "**Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men**; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences."

Verse 11 would seem to indicate that believers need to recognize that the unsaved are under the terrible wrath of God, which will be poured out on the lost on Judgment Day, so for that reason, believers are to persuade men to repent. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 5:10, as in every epistle that he wrote, was talking to the corporate church, consisting of believers and some who might not have been believers. So when he said "that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad", we must realize that only believers can do that which is good - works of true righteousness. The unsaved produce works that God calls filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). So when true believers appear before the judgment seat of Christ, they will appear **justified**:

Romans 5:1 - "Therefore **being justified** by faith, **we have peace with God** through our Lord Jesus Christ"

Aren't believers the ones who will do the judging and not the ones who are being judged?

1Cor 6:3 - "Know ye not that **we shall judge angels**? how much more things that pertain to this life?"

Doesn't the Bible say that God remembers our sins no more?

Hebrews 8:12 - "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and **their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.**"

Hebrews 10:17 - "And **their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.**"

Taking into consideration the above verses, how can we say that believers will be judged at some future judgment, even if it is just a judgment for rewards? Doesn't the Bible say that there is nothing that God could condemn us for doing or not doing?

Romans 8:1 - "*There is therefore now **no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus**, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*"

John 3:18 - "**He that believeth on him is not condemned**: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

John 5:24 - "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and **shall not come into condemnation**; but is passed from death unto life."

When believers sin and fail to repent, God chastens them (in this life) so that they will repent. He does not keep score until Judgment Day:

1Corinthians 11:32 - "But **when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord**, that **we should not be condemned** with the world."

Conclusion

Any theology that causes us to focus on what we can get from God rather than what we can and should do for God is not from God. Besides, what can God give to His people that can compare with the gift of His Son? But you may have been told "We don't desire crowns or rewards for ourselves, but that we may give them back to Christ, laying them at His feet" as in Revelation 4:10. That passage is certainly a picture of the fact that everything we have is from God.

I don't know about you, but for me Jesus is all the reward I need and all the reward I want when I get to heaven. It would be an insult to Him to expect anything more, especially since Christ is incomparably more glorious and exceedingly more desirable than anything else on earth or in heaven:

Psa 73: 25-26 - "25 Whom have I in heaven *but thee?* and *there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.* 26 My flesh and my heart faileth: *but **God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.***"

**“Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I
should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ”
[Ephesians 3:8]**
