

You and God's Rewards

In year 539 BC something extraordinary happened at one of king Belshazzar's great banquets: "the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall." Extremely frightened, he offered a great reward to anyone who could decipher the message. "Then Daniel answered the king, 'You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your *rewards* to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means'" (Dan. 5:4,17). Should Christians also reject rewards? Perhaps some of us see a reward as a kind of bribe, a selfish motivation which risks devaluing a noble cause. Our ideal is to serve God out of gratitude and love with no interest in additional rewards. But is this the right attitude? Of course we are saved by grace and this is no reward for good behaviour (Eph. 2:8-10). But what if God has chosen to dispense rewards to you and me depending on how you and I live on earth? Is it really so 'spiritual' to ignore such Scriptural references to 'rewards'?

Rewards encourage

The author of the letter to the Hebrews reminded his readers that their forefather Moses "regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead *to his reward*." More, he affirmed that if we want to please God, we "must believe that he exists and that he *rewards* those who earnestly seek him" (Heb. 11:6, 26). This is a great encouragement. The life choices you and I make as Christians are not forgotten, they have eternal value! There is no need to compare or compete with fellow believers for each of us "will be *rewarded* according to his own labour" (1 Cor. 3:8). "I tell you the truth" said the Lord Jesus, that even small acts of kindness, like he who gives a cup of cold water, "will certainly not lose *his reward*" (Mat. 10:42).

Conditional rewards

It is worth noting that often rewards in Scripture are conditional. There is usually an 'if' connected with them: "*If* anyone gives a cup of cold water..." (Mat. 10:42). "*If* I preach voluntarily, I have a *reward*" (1 Cor. 9:17). "*If* you love those who love you, what *reward* will you get?" (Mat. 5:46). In serving God and others, we should not try to impress people. "*If* you do, you will have no *reward* from your Father in heaven" (Mat. 6:1). In serving God and others we should seek to follow then Lord's leading and serve empowered by the Holy Spirit: "*If* what he has built survives, he will receive his *reward*" (1 Cor. 3:14). The Lord's rewards encourage me to serve faithfully even when results are not currently visible and to choose, act and serve with the right attitude.

Look to the future

Whether you like the idea of rewards or not, we are told rewards *will* be distributed. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may *receive what is due to him* for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). Our deepest and highest motivation is to please Christ – the one to whom we are ultimately accountable. For us Christians, matters of sin have been completely dealt with at Calvary, so the 'good or bad' must refer to the relative value of our life choices. Let's live wisely. Let's seek first His kingdom. Let's invest in what has eternal value. Of course our greatest joy is to please Him and meet Him. As the LORD said to Abram "*I am your shield, your very great reward*" (Gen. 15:1). Most of us go through some heavy days and long dark nights – in which we are sometimes tempted to give up, to let go and to let ourselves float down with the secular stream. If that is your current situation, look to the future. "So do not throw away your confidence; it will be *richly rewarded*" (Heb. 10:35). How? What *exactly* does a divine 'reward' look like? I enjoy the anticipation and am willing allow myself to be happily surprised!

Philip Nunn
Eindhoven, NL - August 2013
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