

Basic Training Bible Ministries

presents

“Pressing on for the Prize”

An Overview of the Doctrine of Eternal Rewards



“I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 3:14

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In Pursuit of the Prize

*“Moreover by them [commandments] Your servant is warned,
and in keeping them there is **great reward**.”*

Psalm 19:11

*“Surely there is a **reward** for the righteous; Surely He is a God who judges in the earth.”*

Psalm 58:11

*“But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to **your inheritance**
at the end of the days.”*

Daniel 12:13

*“But go thou thy way till the end be; for thou shalt **rest**, and stand
in **thy lot** at the end of the days.”*

Daniel 12:13 (KJV)

*“Those who are wise shall **shine like the brightness** of the firmament,
and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.”*

Daniel 12:3

*“O LORD, You are the portion of my **inheritance** and my cup; You maintain **my lot**. The lines
have fallen to me in pleasant places; Yes, I have a good **inheritance**.”*

Psalm 16:5–6

*“So a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD
and who meditate on His name. They shall be Mine, says the LORD of hosts,
on the day that I make them My **jewels**.”*

Malachi 3:16b–17a

*“Having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our
inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, to **the praise of His glory**.”*

Ephesians 1:13b–14

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ... Who ... has begotten us again to a
living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to **an inheritance**
incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,
who are kept by the power of God ...”*

1 Peter 1:3–5

*“And behold, I am coming quickly, and **My reward** is with Me, to give to everyone
according to his work. I AM the Alpha and the Omega,
the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.”*

Revelation 22:12–13

*“Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him ... For evil doers shall be cut off, but those who wait on the LORD, they shall **inherit the earth** ... But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.”*

Psalm 37:7, 9, 11

“But many who are first shall be last, and the last first ... So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen.”

Matthew 19:30; 20:16

*“For 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, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience **inherit the promises** ... and so, after he [Abraham] had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.”*

Hebrews 6:10–12, 15

*“For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit **reap everlasting life**. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season **we shall reap** if we do not lose heart.”*

Galatians 6:8–9

*“Command those who are rich in this present age ... [to] do good, that they may be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may **lay hold on eternal life**.” (i.e. have a share in the life to come).*

1 Timothy 6:17–19

*“Do not love the world or the things that are in the world ... the world is passing away, and the lust of it, but he who does the will of God **abides forever**.” (has eternal renown—Hodges)*

1 John 2:15–17

*“Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman [Mary] has done will also be told **as a memorial** to her.”*

Mark 14:9

*“He who **overcomes** (pres. act. ptc.) **shall inherit** all things, and I will be his God and he shall be **My son** (cf. Rom. 8:17)*

Revelation 21:7

The Rewardable Life

If you want to be great in the kingdom, become the least on this earth. How can you do this? Become a servant of servants (Matt. 23:11–12). That might even require being cursed (Gen. 9:25). It is always difficult to identify the “least.” That is because they hide themselves. They have the modesty of true humility (meekness). For them, to call attention to themselves is as shameful as to appear in public naked. It is even worse than that, it is obscene. They withdraw from the rush to the front—the vying for position—that makes much of the Christian world look like a three-ring circus.

I will tell you what the “first” look like. They look like Nigerian Pastor Lawan, who said recently before being beheaded by Boko Haram, “Don’t cry. Don’t worry. But thank God for everything.”

One does not have to be a martyr to be last (or first). You just have to be the lowliest servant. The greatest example of how to do it was given by the greatest Servant of all. The greatest reward goes to those who are meek and humble (Matt. 5:5).

“If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.”

John 13:14–15

“Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life for many.”

Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45

STUDY ONE: THE OFFER OF REWARD (Matthew 5:1–12; 6:1–6; 19–21)

There is a principle that comes out in Jesus' first major discourse (Beatitudes) that faithful obedience leads to blessing in time and reward in eternity. Yet, we need to be aware of the common fallacy of equating blessings with material possessions or social status. The blessings of which Jesus speaks in the Beatitudes are not inconsistent with persecution and suffering. True blessing is found in personal intimacy with the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the experience of His fellowship, presence, and power.

Three important principles

1. The works that gain reward are not usually visible. *“Your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.”* Matthew 6:4, 6.
2. These works include:
 - developing the character of Christ (5:1–12),
 - deeds of charity/mercy (6:1–4),
 - Prayer (6:5–15) and fasting (6:16–18).
3. Those who portray God as a harsh taskmaster are usually those who are failing to live by faith (Matt. 25:24–25).

Jesus Introduces the New Testament Teaching on Reward

1. The first offer of reward is for Christ-conformity (Matt. 5:3–11).
I believe it was Warren Wiersbe, who said of the Beatitudes, that they are “Be-attitudes, or attitudes that ought to be.” This statement captures the truth that the “blessedness” of which Jesus spoke was due to an inner transformation of the heart and mind (Rom. 12:1–2). What these qualities represent is conformity to Christ (Rom. 8:29).
2. Reward will be given for enduring persecution (Matt. 5:11–12).
An inward conformity to Christ will have radical effects on the life of the disciple (Gal. 2:20). This will, in turn, result in hostility from the world (John 15:18). Suffering is the inevitable fate of all who seek to follow Jesus Christ (James 1:2).
3. Reward will be given for loving your enemies (Matt. 5:43–48).
It is the mark of a true disciple of Christ that he or she will have enemies. They will cloak their hatred in many guises to make it appear acceptable. Yet, we are commanded to love our enemies. This does not mean to grovel before them, or to seek to placate them. We love them with the desire and prayer that they might come to know Christ and escape the eternal doom of Hell.
4. Reward will be given for acts of charity/mercy (Matt. 6:1–4 cf. 10:41).
All of us are surrounded by those in need. While sometimes the needs are physical, often, they are psychological and spiritual. Acts of mercy and charity are a means of not only meeting “felt needs,” but also of showing the love of Christ and opening the door to witness about the Good News of Jesus Christ and His saving work on the cross. Calling attention to these acts diminishes their value and robs us of the equivalent reward.

5. Reward will be given for effective prayer (Matt. 6:5–15).
Private prayer should be the norm for every believer. Although we may be called on to offer public prayer, and even join others in prayer, our private prayers should be the most detailed and demanding. Prayer is work! It is most effective when it is demanding—when we pay a price for it. And Jesus puts His finger on one of the things we need to pray for often: to be forgiven (1 John 1:9) and to forgive others (Matt. 18:21–22).
6. Reward will be given for genuine fasting (Matt. 6:16–18).
Jesus assumed that His followers would fast. There are many ways to fast, and nowhere are we given a specific method. Fasting can include abstinence from anything for the sake of study, meditating on God’s Word, and prayer. The idea here is specifically fasting from eating. Again, calling attention to what we are doing robs us of the real blessing and reward.
7. True spirituality, faithfulness, obedience, and service to God (Matt. 6:19–21)
These are means of laying up treasures in Heaven. In a sense, we all get the opportunity to furnish our own dwelling-place in Heaven.

Summary

1. True spirituality is invisible to others! This is contrary to the whole “perseverance of the saints” and “Lordship” concept of “proving” your salvation. The statement “*You will know them by their fruits*” (Matt. 7:16) is in the context of false teachers and is not a justification for anyone to become a “fruit inspector” of others.
2. Genuine godliness is a matter of the heart (Mark 7:13–23). **Attitude** produces **Values/priorities**, which lead to **Decisions**, producing **Actions**, which bring **Results**.
3. God will bless us in time for faithfulness, but His reward waits for eternity.
4. In this, His first major message, Jesus highlights three great truths:
 - That we should view God as our heavenly Father (Matt. 5:48; 6:1, 6, 8, 9, 14–15, 18, 26),
 - That God desires to bless us in time (Matt. 5:1–12), and
 - That faithful service, through right motivation, can gain for us eternal rewards (Matt. 5:46; 6:1, 4, 6, 16, 18, 20).

The Bema Seat, Place of Gain or Loss? (1 Corinthians 3:11–15)

In the ancient Roman world, the Bema Seat was like our victory stand at the Olympics. Those who had won in an event were awarded the prize, usually a wreath of ivy. Even though this wreath withered quickly, it came with great prestige and power. Victors from the games often had a special opening made in the wall in their home city, through which they would return to cheers of the populace. After they passed through, it was sealed up, and their name and victories were written on it. They were given a pension for life, and their children were given the best education. Many other privileges were theirs as well.

Those who did not achieve the victory lost the prize and the prestige that went with it. In this passage, Paul compares the Bema to a building contest.

Five things stand out that are of value to us:

1. The foundation of all that we do is faith in Jesus Christ (v. 11). This foundation is not one that we lay, but which God has laid, and is unshakeable (Heb. 12:28).
2. Works of faith are compared to building materials that can withstand trial by fire: gold, silver, precious stones. Whatever we build using acceptable materials (i.e. the Word of God, faith, reliance on the Spirit of God), will be rewarded (John 15:5; Gal. 5:22–23).
3. All other materials are compared to wood, hay, straw, which cannot withstand the “test of fire”. It is the scrutiny of the Lord Jesus Christ that the fire represents. He will not accept works done with human motivation that are, in reality, “*works of the flesh*” (Gal. 5:19–21).
4. The reward will be equivalent to the quality of the works (Rev. 22:12).
5. Even if one were to suffer the loss of all earthly achievements, he is still secure regarding salvation, because he stands on the foundation of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:15).

The goal of passages like this is to challenge us to strive so as to win the prize (1 Cor. 9:24).

STUDY TWO: THE CHALLENGE TO THE HEBREWS

First of all, we should deal with the question, “Who wrote the book of Hebrews?” For many this is a question that cannot be answered. However, we have an answer, and it comes from the Bible itself.

1. Peter wrote two epistles to the Jews of the dispersion (1 Pet. 1:1; 2 Pet. 3:1). It is worth remembering that Peter was the apostle to the Jews (Gal. 2:7–8).
2. Peter reminded those Jewish believers that Paul had also written an epistle to them (2 Pet. 3:15).
3. Peter further declared that this epistle contained some things “*hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction.*” (2 Pet. 3:16).
4. Peter calls this epistle, “*Scripture,*” therefore, it must have been preserved by God for us and not lost (Matt. 24:35; 1 Pet. 1:25).
5. The only epistle that can meet these claims is the epistle to the Hebrews!

In the book of Hebrews, we begin with a spiritual formula: **worship**, **walk**, and **work**. This is set forth in the first six chapters of the book, leading up to the presentation of the High-Priestly work of the Lord Jesus Christ:

1. Worship, Hebrews 1–2, the superiority of the Lord Jesus Christ,
2. Walk, Hebrews 3–4, either worthy or unworthy,
3. Work, Hebrews 5:12–6:20, pressing on to maturity and bearing good fruit.

This process is a familiar one in the full scope of the Bible. For example, in Hebrews 11:4–7, we are introduced to Abel, Enoch, and Noah:

1. Abel is an example of faithful worship. (Gen. 4:4; Heb. 11:4)
2. Enoch, as we all know, is the example of a faithful walk (Gen. 5:24).
3. Noah, whose name means “rest,” demonstrates faithful work by, preaching and building the ark. (Gen. 6:22)

These three aspects of the life of faith are also depicted in three Bible books:

1. Leviticus is concerned with right worship.
2. Numbers deals with both a faithful and unfaithful walk.
3. Deuteronomy looks at the work—how to live by faith.

We find the same formula given by David in considering those who are counted worthy to dwell in the temple of the Lord (Psa. 15:1–2):

1. Worship: “*Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle?*”
2. Walk: “*He who walks uprightly...*”
3. Work: “*And works righteousness and speaks truth in his heart.*”

It is also interesting that the Apostle Paul chose this format when writing the book of Ephesians:

1. Worship (seated with Christ), Chapters 1–3,
2. Walking (Christian living), Chapters 4–5, and
3. Working (the warfare), Chapter 6.

It should not be surprising that this format also leads us to the three words Paul uses to describe the dynamic of the Christian life: **faith**, **hope**, and **love**. These three words are found in Hebrews 6:10–12, as a picture of a balanced life of faith, and appear again in Hebrews 10:22–25 in a practical form of exhortation:

1. “*Let us draw near...in full assurance of **faith**,*” Hebrews 10:22, faith = worship.
2. “*Let us hold fast...our **hope**,*” Hebrews 10:23, hope = walk.
3. “*Let us consider one another...to stir up **love** and good works,*” Hebrews 10:24–25, love = work (compare Gal. 5:6).

The Problem of the Hebrew Believers

Five warning/exhortation passages in the book reveal a growing spiritual lethargy in these believers, which would inevitably lead to a point of no return:

1. The danger of drifting from God’s Word (Heb. 2:1–4),
2. The danger of doubting God’s Word (Heb. 3:12–4:13),
3. The danger of dullness to God’s Word (Heb. 5:11–14),
4. The danger of willful disobedience to God’s Word (Heb. 10:26–39), and
5. The danger of despising God’s Word (Heb. 12:12–17).

These five steps show the progression, the downward spiral if you will, that takes place in the life of the believer who does not “*go on to perfection* [maturity]” (Heb. 6:1) in the Christian life. This same process is seen in Galatians 5:1–7 and Ephesians 4:17–19. The end result is a point of no return, where the heart becomes so hardened against God’s Word that “*It is impossible to renew them to repentance*” (Heb. 6:4–6). This is equivalent to the “*sin unto death*” (1 John 5:16), which has two practical applications:

1. Sin, which persists to the point of operational death (1 Tim. 5:6, 11–13, 15), or
2. Sin, which is so destructive that God removes the believer through death (Acts 5:1–11; 1 Cor. 5:1–5).

The Potential for Gain or Loss

The warning sections of the book of Hebrews set forth the truth that how we live our lives after our initial salvation will result either in eternal gain, or in eternal loss. The examples of both are found in the Exodus generation (Heb. 3–4). Although this generation was made up of believers (Exod. 12, with 14:31), “*With most of them God was not well pleased*” (1 Cor. 10:5). They died under discipline in the wilderness!

The Failed Legacy of the Exodus Generation Applied (Hebrews 3:1–19)

1. The failure of the Exodus generation was due to unbelief in God’s promises, resulting in failure to enter into the promised land, vv. 7–11.
2. The “*rest*” spoken of here referred to both blessings in time and reward in eternity. Note in Deuteronomy 12:8–9 “*rest*” equals “*inheritance*.”
3. The recipients of Hebrews, and we today, are in danger of even greater failure, vv. 12–19. Note vv. 1–6, Jesus Christ is eminently “*greater than Moses*.”
4. The most important day of your life is “*today*,” vv. 7, 13. Your choices today will affect your status in eternity.
5. Participation in the household of Christ is conditional on holding steadfast faith “*to the end*,” vv. 6, 14. You are only “*partakers*” in the “household” when you are “*faithful*,” vv. 5–6.

The Challenge to “Enter into His Rest” (Hebrews 4:1–16)

This passage is worthy of careful consideration lest we fail to grasp what “*rest*” means. In chapter 3, it spoke of failure to enter into Canaan. In this chapter, there are actually five uses of the word “rest”:

1. It is used of God’s rest after creation, 4:4, 10.
2. It is used of the Canaan rest that Israel rejected, 4:3b (also in 3:11).
3. It is used of the believer’s salvation rest in Christ, 4:3a, 10.
4. It is used of the rest of victory in the Christian life, 4:11. This rest has implications for eternal inheritance.
5. Finally, it is used of the eternal rest of God, 4:9 (cf. Rev. 14:13), in which our success or failure to live the faith-rest life will be reflected.

Four Exhortations from this Passage:

1. **We should fear**, 4:1–3, 10.

Israel believed the “good news” (Gospel) of the Passover, but then rejected the “good news” about the promised land. Like them, we who have believed have entered into the first rest (salvation, Matt. 11:28) in which all depends on the faithfulness of God. But entrance into the second rest (victorious life, Matt. 11:29–30) depends upon the faith and faithfulness of the believer. In the first rest, God does all the work. In the second rest, the work is a partnership (remember “*partakers of Christ*,” Heb. 3:14) involving our works.

2. **We should be diligent**, 4:11–13.

In order to enter into the second rest, the faith-rest life (remember, “*The just shall live by faith*,” 10:38, and “*Without faith it is impossible to please God*,” 11:6), we must labor—be diligent. This “diligence” is related to knowledge and the application of the Word of God. This same word is translated, “*study*” in 2 Timothy 2:15 (KJV). In other words, we must mix the Word of God with faith (4:2). God’s Word is both “*Living and powerful*” to meet our every need, but it is also “*piercing*” and “*a discerner*” of our inner “*thoughts and intents*” (motives).

3. **We should hold fast**, 4:14–15.

These Hebrew believers, facing fierce persecution, were tempted to go back to the rituals and shadows of Judaism, thereby “*they crucify again [afresh] the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame*” (Heb. 6:6). This is the “*departing*” and the “*draws back*” mentioned in 3:12 and 10:38. Our bold confidence and confession is that Jesus Christ is our “*High Priest*,” after “*the order of Melchizedek*” (Heb. 5:5–6, 10; 6:20; 7:17, 21). Just as Melchizedek brought bread and wine to Abraham (Gen. 14:18–20), a reminder to him that God was his source of security and reward (Gen. 15:1), so Jesus Christ instituted for the Lord’s table—a reminder that we are to live in the power of the New Covenant of grace.

4. **We should come boldly**, 4:16.

Next to diligent study of the Word of God, we need to develop an effective prayer life, based on an understanding of the ministry of Christ at the right hand of God, and our position with Him (Col. 3:1–4). Theologically, this is called the doctrine of the Present Session of Christ. Because He intercedes (“*makes intercession*”) for us (Rom. 8:31–37) and is our “*Advocate*” (1 John 2:1), we can pray with confidence and power. When Jesus cried, “*It is finished*” (John 19:30), the veil in the temple rent from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51), declaring all temple worship obsolete (Heb. 7:12, 18; 8:13), and opened “*the way*” (John 14:6) for every believer to enter directly into the presence of God—Jesus Christ being the only “*Mediator*” (1 Tim. 2:5).

Rewards Demand Endurance

The theme of “holding fast to the end” and of “patient endurance” runs through the book of Hebrews (3:6, 14; 4:14; 6:12–15; 10:35–39; 12:1–3). Time and space do not allow us the ability to cover this topic in detail now.

It is certain that no child of God is going to attain to absolute holiness. Every believer struggles with trials and temptations and, in many ways, we all fail (James 3:2). Endurance does not mean sinless perfection. Rather, it means never giving up. The true victor is the believer who falls many times (Prov. 24:16) but always rises up again in faith and presses on. We will cover the challenge, “*Let us run with endurance the race set before us*” (Heb. 12:1) in our final study on the example of Jesus Christ.

Summary

The central focus of Hebrews is the High Priesthood of Jesus after the order of Melchizedek, in establishing the New Covenant (4:14–16; 5:1–6; chapter 7; 8:1–6). Because of this, it is high time to leave behind spiritual immaturity (5:11–14), and to press on to maturity and fruitfulness (6:1–8). Otherwise, we will enter into eternity only to find that we, like Esau, traded rich eternal inheritance for temporal gain (12:14–17).

Twelve Things You Can Lose as a Christian:

- | | |
|------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Fellowship | 7. Blessing |
| 2. Assurance | 8. Fruitfulness |
| 3. Joy | 9. Purpose |
| 4. Effectiveness | 10. Stability |
| 5. Power | 11. Hope |
| 6. Witness | 12. Reward |

*“Looking diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many be defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food **sold his birthright**. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to **inherit** the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.”* Hebrews 12:15–17

But never doubt our Redeemer’s ability to restore what was lost (Joel 2:25; Luke 15:22–24; 19:10). We will see a great example of this in Study Six, in the person of Moses.

STUDY THREE: INHERITANCE AND REWARD

“But he shall acknowledge the son of the unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double portion of all that he has ... the right of the firstborn is his.” Deuteronomy 21:17

“Looking diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God ... lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.” Hebrews 12:15–17

All too often, salvation, inheritance, and reward are confused. There are spiritual assets we receive, as a result of, salvation that are irrevocable (Rom. 11:29). However, when it comes to eternal reward, it is possible to fail to attain or forfeit some rewards. The “*double portion*” of the “*firstborn*” (Deut. 21:17) involved greater wealth, authority of the family, the honor of the Father’s name, and the responsibility to care for the family. This was seen in priesthood and rulership over the family, and double wealth. Yet, we have examples of those who, due to failure, forfeited their birthright to others:

- Esau bartered away his birthright to Jacob because he despised its value (Gen. 25:29–34).
- Reuben, due to his sin of fornication (Gen. 35:21–22; 49:1–4), caused the priesthood to go to Levi, and the crown, to Judah.

Children, Sons, and Heirs

“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.” Romans 8:16–17

There are many passages in the Bible that are troubling because of one little word—“*if*.” Yet, that little word is important, and we are far better off if we do not avoid dealing with it. We can best explain its significance here by going back to verse 12.

The Debt that Leads to Maturity (Romans 8:12–14)

It is interesting to ask a group of believers the following question: “Does grace incur debt?” On the one hand, we would answer emphatically, “No!” because we could never repay the grace of God in a million years. And yet, there is another sense in which we owe a debt of gratitude, “*the love of Christ compels us*,” (2 Cor. 5:14). Paul saw himself as a debtor to Christ, and therefore to the world for which Christ died (Rom. 1:14–15). In this sense, our debt is to recognize our responsibility as a believer.

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God.” Romans 8:14

Here, Paul uses the word *huios*, which speaks of a mature, responsible son. We are actually adopted into this position at the moment of salvation and are supplied with all the riches of God’s household (Eph. 1:3–5; see also 2 Pet. 1:3). However, we still have to grow into the stature of a mature son of God, if we are to fulfill our purpose. The realization that we have been “*called according to His purpose*” (Rom. 8:28), and uniquely gifted for a specific task, lays on us the “*yoke*” of learning from and following Him (Matt. 11:29–30).

Children Who Never Grow Up (Romans 8:15–16)

It is a sad but obvious fact that many (most) believers never grow up spiritually. Knowing that they have eternal life is enough for them, and they have no sense of gratitude that moves them to say “thank you” to the Lord for what He has done.

Believers who do not grow up are always subject to various fears. They waver between assurance and fear, because they lack the sure foundation of a faith that is doctrinally grounded (see 2 Tim. 2:7; Heb. 10:26–27, 29–31). While, the indwelling Holy Spirit seeks to comfort the immature believers, and urge them to grow up, they continue to live in spiritual infancy and bondage to fear!

Dividing the Inheritance

The ancient custom of inheritance was that the firstborn received a “*double portion*,” or two-thirds, of the father’s inheritance (Deut. 21:17). Originally, this included priesthood over the family, rulership, and additional wealth. However, because of failure or disobedience, this extra portion could be lost and transferred to another son. Consider Jacob, who received the despised and bartered birthright of Esau. Or Joseph, who was exalted over all his brethren.

This is what Paul has in mind here in Romans 8:17. Note that there are two categories of heirs:

1. “*If children, then ... heirs of God.*” Every child of God has an irrevocable eternal inheritance as a member of the Royal Family of God (1 Pet. 1:4–5). However, by growth and service we can enhance that initial inheritance into “*treasure in heaven*” (Matt. 6:20).
2. “*Joint-heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.*” Here, we have those “*sons*” of v. 14 who are accustomed to being led by the Holy Spirit. By His leading, they first grow, then serve, and in due time, suffer for their commitment to Christ. These will share the inheritance of the Firstborn in eternal reward. This is what Paul was speaking of when he sought to “*know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings ... the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*” (Phil. 3:10, 14). We will see more of this when we look at Paul’s example.

The Path that Leads to Eternal Riches (2 Peter 1:2–11)

In this excellent passage, Peter gives us a road map to eternal reward. Without delving into all the details, here are the five signposts to enhanced inheritance:

1. First, there must be regeneration by faith, v. 2–4.
2. This is to be followed by consistent spiritual growth, v. 5–7.
3. Growth results in production, as we learn our spiritual gift and engage in the plan of God for our life, v. 8–9. Take careful note of the plight of the immature and unproductive believer in v. 9!
4. Growth, service, and fruitfulness brings a stability to the soul and the life of the mature believer that nothing can shake, v. 10. The idea here is not that you will be sinless, or without failure. It is that you will never stumble to the point of ultimate failure (Jude 24).
5. The end result of following this simple path is an entrance into the kingdom of Jesus Christ with abundance supplied, v. 11 (see also John 10:10). The words used in the original Greek (*plousios + epichoregeo*) here suggest a super-abundant entrance into the kingdom!

Assurance or Shame

In 1 John 2:28, John makes it clear that when we stand before Jesus Christ in all His glory, there will be two opposite attitudes and emotions in the souls of believers. Some will “*be ashamed before Him at His coming,*” while others will “*have confidence*” when He appears. The first group will be immature and unproductive. The second will be mature sons who have accepted their responsibilities in the family and played the role intended for them.

Summary

1. All who are children of God share in eternal inheritance (Gal. 3:6–9, 26–29; 4:6–7; Eph. 1:13–14; 1 Pet. 5:1–5).
2. Inheritance will be apportioned by Christ Himself according to our works (Rom. 2:6; Rev. 22:12).
3. Those who consistently grow, serve, and endure, will receive a greater portion of the inheritance (Matt. 6:20; Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 2:11–13; 2 Pet. 1:8–11).

STUDY FOUR: THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA (Revelation 2–3)

“Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward.” 2 John 8

“And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with me, to give to everyone according to his work.” Revelation 22:12

Sacred Cow Slaughterhouse (Apologies to Michael Z. Williamson)

Before we can deal with the seven churches of Revelation, it is necessary to address a couple of critical questions.

It is clear throughout Scripture that special rewards will be given to believers who are faithful in personal sanctification, in service, and in overcoming various tests and trials. It is also true that there are assets and privileges, which are given to all believers due to their union with Jesus Christ by simple faith in Him.

One question that is often avoided, but is crucial theologically, is this:

“Which is greater: the **positional** provisions given to every believer, or those special rewards given for **practical** faithfulness?” Another way to state it is: “Which is greater, that which we gain by virtue of Christ’s victory, or that which we gain by our own victory?” If you opt for the first, you will always emphasize the positional over the practical (Christ-centered thinking). If you choose the second, you will tend to view every passage as highlighting the practical over the positional (Christian-centered thinking).

This contrast in thinking can be easily illustrated by comparing the old hymns of the faith to the vast majority of modern “worship music.” In the old hymns, Christ is the central figure, and His victory on the cross on our behalf is the dominant theme. All attention to our sanctification and faithful service is seen as the result of faith and as expressions of gratitude for His sacrifice.

By contrast, modern Christian music is most concerned with the Christian, as illustrated by a phrase repeated monotonously along the lines of “I will,” “I give,” “My heart,” or some variation. The endless repetition of “I,” “Me,” “Mine” and of what “I” am going to do for Christ is dominant. Tragically, while this man-centered focus of this present age is prophesied by the message to the church of Laodicea, far too much of its influence is being seen even among those who identify today as “free-grace” proponents!

This matters because when we come to the seven churches of the Revelation, our theological “sacred cow” will inevitably affect our interpretation. This is critical in regard to our identification of the “overcomer.” We will either see the “overcomer” through the lens of a Christ-centered theology, or we will view the “overcomer” in the light of a Christian-centered focus.

Let’s not lose sight of the divinely inspired and Spirit-revealed theme of the book: ***“The Revelation of Jesus Christ ... I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, says the Lord, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty”*** (Rev. 1:1, 8). If we never deviate from this theme, we will do well!

About the Overcomers

In light of what has been said above, we need to look at the overcomers from a Christ-centered perspective, and not fall into the trap of becoming Christian-centered.

The question that must be asked is, do we identify the “one who is an overcomer” based on his position in Christ, or based on his/her performance? One approach obviously fits with the central theme of the book, *“The Revelation of Jesus Christ,”* while the other does not.

The phrase, *“him who overcomes”* is repeated at the end of each message. In the Greek language, *to nikonti* is a present, active, participle, of the verb *nikao* (“to be a victor, to gain a victory,” *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*), in the dative case of advantage. It is used as a substantive, which acts as a noun, thus “to the one whose advantage it is to be an overcomer.” All of this becomes too technical for most of us, so let’s look at how the word is used prior to the Revelation:

1. *“In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33). Obviously, the victory of Christ applies to all believers.
2. *“Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us”* (Rom. 8:37). The term could be translated “super-conquerors,” and is obviously used of all believers.

3. “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:57). The context is victory over death and certain resurrection.
4. “You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). This obviously refers to our position in Christ by faith.
5. “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4–5). Here, we have the only passage in the Bible that clearly defines who the overcomer is. Now we can move on to the message to the seven churches.

The Message to the Seven Churches (Revelation 1–3)

The interpretive key to the message to the churches is given in Revelation 1:12–20. Here, John sees the Lord Jesus Christ in all His glory. In the face of this revelation, John, “*the disciple Jesus loved*” (John 13:23; 19:26; 21:20), who was more intimate with Him than any other disciple, “**fell at His feet as dead,**” (Rev. 1:17). Various aspects of His glorified Person are emphasized in addressing each church.

Since our study has to do specifically with eternal rewards, we cannot deal with all the points made to each church. We will try to hit the high-points and zero in on the promises to the overcomers.

The question arises, based on what has been written above: Do the promises to the overcomers then belong to all Christians, or only to those who actively overcome? To which the answer is: “Yes.” Read on!

1. **The Church of Ephesus**, Revelation 2:1–7
 - Commendation, vv. 1–3, 6
Faithful in works, labor, patience, and rejection of false teachers
 - Rebuke/Correction, vv. 4–5
Departure from first love, called to remember, repent, and return
 - Promise to Overcomers, v. 7
To eat of the “*tree of life*” in the Paradise of God is the equivalent of eternal life, given to all who believe (see Rev. 22:1–2, 14)
Note: In Revelation 22:14, the best rendering is, “*Blessed are those who have washed their robes.*” (NASB)
2. **The Church of Smyrna**, Revelation 2:8–11
 - Commendation, vv. 8–9
Good works, suffering, poverty (spiritually rich), resistance to the Synagogue of Satan
 - Rebuke/Correction—none!
 - Promise to Overcomers, vv. 10–11

Please note carefully that a challenge and a promise is given **before** the message to the overcomers. Do you see it? Here, we have two groups of believers:

- a. Those who are “*faithful until death*” (v. 10), will receive “*the crown of life*.” This is consistent with James 1:12.
- b. Those who are overcomers by virtue of union with Christ, “*shall not be hurt by the second death*” (v. 11; see Rev. 20:1–6).

3. **The Church of Pergamum**, Revelation 2:12–17

- Commendation, vv. 12–13
Good works, resistance to Satan (Luciferian cults), refusal to deny the faith—even in the face of martyrdom
- Rebuke/Correction, vv. 14–16
Toleration of doctrine of Balaam (sexual compromise), doctrine of Nicolaitans (tyrannical clergy), call to repent or face judgment
- Promise to Overcomers, v. 17
Hidden manna (eternal spiritual food), a white stone and new name (new eternal identity)
Note: Name changes in Scripture are not based on merit, but rather on what God, by His grace makes of the individual. Here, there are no distinctions—all believers are included.

4. **The Church of Thyatira**, Revelation 2:18–29

- Commendation, vv. 18–19
Good works, love, service, faith, patience—greater than before
- Rebuke/Correction, vv. 20–24
Tolerance of Jezebel, sexual immorality, unrepentance by her followers, certainty of judgment unless they repent
- Promise to Overcomers, vv. 25–29
As with Smyrna, **note** the additional commands: “*Hold fast ... till I come ... and keeps My works until the end ... I will give power over the nations ... and ... the morning star.*” This authority and decoration will only be given to “overcomers” who also hold fast to the end. This is consistent with 2 Timothy 4:6–8; James 1:12; Hebrews 6:11–12; 10:22–25, 35–36.

5. **The Church of Sardis**, Revelation 3:1–6

- Commendation—none!
Both Sardis and Laodicea are without any commendation!
- Rebuke/Correction, vv. 1–3
Rebuked for spiritual deadness, imperfect works, called to be watchful (spiritual wake-up), strengthen what remains, remember God’s Word, hold fast, repent
- Promise to Overcomers, vv. 4–6
Note: There is a special promise to those who have not compromised. To “*walk with Me in white,*” is reminiscent of the Triumvirate, where the victorious general paid respect to warriors of conspicuous gallantry. Other overcomers will also be clothed in white, and none will be blotted from the Book of Life. Confession of Christ before men results in His confession of us before the Father.

6. **The Church of Philadelphia**, Revelation 3:7–13

- Commendation, vv. 7–9
Good works, obedience, faithful witness—open missionary door. The synagogue of Satan will be subdued before them.
- Rebuke/Correction—none!
- Promise to Overcomers, vv. 10–13
The phrase, “*Because you have kept My command to persevere,*” goes above and beyond simply believing in Christ: deliverance from coming trial (temporal blessing) and potential **crown** (eternal reward) are given to them if they persevere. Then, the “overcomers” are promised a unique place in the temple. This is consistent to what Paul says of all believers (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21–22). Again, this is accompanied with new names.

7. **The Church of Laodicea**, Revelation 3:14–22

- Commendation—none!
- Rebuke/Correction, vv. 14–19
Lukewarm, spiritual apathy, spiritual poverty. Challenge to recover spiritual blessings of wealth, covering, and spiritual insight by repentance.
- Promise to Overcomers, vv. 20–22
Temporal promise of fellowship to those who hear. Eternal promise of sharing His throne, consistent with the position of all believers at the present time (Eph. 2:4–7; Col. 3:1–4).

Summary

1. All who are believers in Jesus Christ are overcomers by virtue of union with Christ (John 16:33; Rom. 8:37; 1 John 5:4–5).
2. All **unconditional** promises made to “overcomers” in the message to the seven churches belong to each and every believer in Christ.
3. Promises that are **conditional** on certain conduct (Smyrna, 2:10; Thyatira, 2:25–26; Sardis, 3:4; and Philadelphia, 3:10–11) are additional rewards based on the faithfulness of individual believers.
4. The Word of God is very clear that there is irrevocable eternal inheritance shared by all believers (Gal. 3:29; 4:6–7; 1 Pet. 1:4–5), as well as special reward to those who grow, serve, and excel (2 Tim. 4:6–8; James 1:12).

STUDY FIVE: THE ROLE OF SUFFERING IN REWARD

*“This is a faithful saying: for if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him.
If we endure [suffer with Him], we shall also reign with Him.
If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless,
He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.”* 2 Timothy 2:11–13

Four Great Doctrinal Truths

The above passage is written in poetic meter and is so recorded in our Bibles. Most likely these were verses of an early hymn.

1. **The assurance of resurrection**: All who are united with Christ by faith share in His death (Rom. 6:3–6; Col. 3:3). If (1st class condition, “since”) we co-died, we shall also co-live.
2. **The potential of eternal reward**: those who share His sufferings (Phil. 3:10) will co-reign with Him. This is a reference to the highest form of reward.
3. **The potential of loss of reward**: those who deny Him in their sufferings will be denied the reward of co-reigning.
4. **The security of our salvation**: even if we are unfaithful, He will remain faithful to us, for to do otherwise would be to deny His promise (Heb. 6:17–20).

It is evident that suffering plays a great role in gaining reward. But does “suffering with Him” refer only to persecution? It would seem that, since only some are chosen for this role, all suffering due to our dedication to His plan for our life would be included. The question is, do we include Him and glorify Him in whatever suffering we may endure? Below, are some support passages for this view.

An Eternal Weight of Glory

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” Romans 8:18

If we look at **2 Corinthians 4:16–18**, we see Paul expanding on a dual thought of suffering endured by believers, and the spiritual tenacity of not losing heart. It will be easiest to look at this in a series of points made in the surrounding context.

1. **2 Cor. 4:1**. Paul and his missionary companions are an example of spiritual steadfastness while under maximum trials. The phrase “*we do not lose heart*” uses the emphatic negative.
2. **2 Cor. 4:5–12**. Paul contrasts the treasure of the light of Christ and the ministry of it with a roster of the afflictions they endured (see 2 Cor. 11:23–28 for a more complete record).
3. **2 Cor. 4:16**. He comes back to his main point, that not losing heart is the key to gaining eternal reward (see also Heb. 6:9–15; 10:32–36).
4. **2 Cor. 4:17**. Whatever we may suffer in this life in the light of eternity will be seen as “*Light affliction ... for a moment.*” But faithfulness will bring an “*eternal weight of glory*” that far exceeds the suffering. Paul is using a Hebraism here, for the Hebrew word for glory is *cabod*, meaning “heavy, weighty.”

5. **2 Cor. 4:18.** Here, we see the secret to not losing heart. We need to keep our eyes fixed, not on the visible (things of this world), but rather on the things that are not seen (eternal realities). Only the Word of God can give us the vision of the things that last, things like:
 - Our spiritual resources (Eph. 1:3; 2 Pet. 1:3–4),
 - Our position in union with Christ (Col. 3:1–4),
 - Our eternal inheritance (1 Pet. 1:4–5), and
 - The victory that is already ours (Rom. 8:37).

Trials, Triumphs, and Trophies

1. **Romans 8:17.** While all children are heirs (Gal. 3:29; 4:7; 1 Pet. 1:4–5), only those who are led by the Spirit (Rom. 8:14) attain the status of adult sons, and the full joint inheritance with Christ.
2. **2 Corinthians 12:7–10.** Here, Paul speaks of the “gift” of his thorn in the flesh. It is my conviction that we all are given a “*thorn*” at some level. The question is how will we deal with it? Paul found it to be an invitation to rely more fully on the grace of God, and so to be strengthened. This would result in reward.
3. **James 1:2, 12.** Note that James speaks here of “*various trials*,” so it is not just persecution that gains eternal reward. The key is to endure the temptation by faith, and the result is the “*crown of life*.” This point is reinforced in James 5:8–11.
4. **1 Peter 4:1, 12–19.** Suffering has the potential to purge us from sin. Whatever form it takes, if we face it strong in the faith, “*according to the will of God commit [our] souls to Him as to a faithful Creator*” (v. 19), on that day when we stand in His presence, we will “*be glad with exceeding joy*” (v. 13).
5. **1 John 2:15–17.** For those who reject the love of the world (worldliness) will suffer, but in the end, “*he who does the will of God abides forever.*” The late Zane Hodges translated this, “will have a reputation of eternal renown.”

The Various Degrees of Reward

1. There are rewards promised for single acts of mercy and kindness (Matt. 10:40–42; Mark 9:41).
2. All rewards will reflect the degree of service and fruitfulness (Matt. 13:8, 23).
3. There are rewards for personal sacrifice for the cause of Christ (Matt. 19:29; Mark 10:29–30). The reward here is a hundred-fold (10,000%).
4. There are greater rewards promised for endurance under trial (James 1:12; Heb. 6:11–12; 10:35–36).
5. Special crowns are offered for different kinds of service:
 - The **imperishable crown** for self-control and discipline (1 Cor. 9:24–27),
 - The **crown of joy** for effective witness (Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19),
 - The **crown of life** for enduring suffering (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10),

- The **crown of righteousness** for those who live in light of Christ’s coming (2 Tim. 4:6–8), and
- The **crown of glory** (1 Pet. 5:1–4), often called the pastor’s crown.

Why Strive for Rewards?

Believers often question the mention of rewards as a basis for motivating us to live faithfully/victoriously. However, remember in Revelation 4:4, 10–11, the twenty-four elders, who represent those believers who have gained crowns, cast them at the Savior’s feet. When they do, they say, *“You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power....”* These crowns were not gained for the sake of the crown, but rather for the privilege of demonstrating gratitude for the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ on our behalf. It is not a question of being motivated by either the love of Christ or the desire for the crown. It is the desire, out of love for Christ, to have something to lay at His feet—a token of our thankfulness for all He has done for us.

“Behold, I come quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.”
Revelation 3:11

STUDY SIX: THE EXAMPLE OF MOSES (Hebrews 11:23–29)

Moses is especially valuable as an example for two reasons:

1. First of all, like the children of Israel, he failed to enter the land due to the sin of unbelief (Num. 20:11–12 cf. Exod. 17:6 and 1 Cor. 10:4). At this point in his life, Moses was just as guilty as the spies who refused to enter the land! This should give hope to all who think some failure in your past is impossible to overcome.
2. Secondly, in spite of his great failure, he is here in Hebrews 11, listed as one who will be greatly rewarded! To adapt Churchill’s saying: “Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage (faith) to continue that counts!”

Since the book of Hebrews is written to challenge faltering believers to live rewardable lives (3:12–19), Moses is especially relevant as an example of one who had greatly failed, yet rose up and pressed on to a heroic life and great reward.

Seven Decisions of Historical Impact

In this section of “the hall/heroes of faith” the author gives great attention to the decisions of Moses. Moses was a man of action. But men of action (the visible) are such because they are men of decisiveness (the invisible)! It is always the heart that moves the hand—not the other way around.

1. **Holy defiance:** The decision of Moses' parents to defy Pharaoh's order, v. 23. There is a time when we must obey God rather than men (Acts 4:19; 5:29). While we are instructed to be obedient to rulers (Rom. 13:1–7), this is in the context of the command not to be overcome by evil (Rom. 12:21).
2. **Resolute rejection:** Moses' decision to not identify with Pharaoh, v. 24. Moses gained many advantages by being raised in the palace (Acts 7:21–22). However, he did not allow his use of the world to become abuse (1 Cor. 7:31).
3. **Humble identification:** Willingness to suffer to identify with God's people, v. 25. In many ways the condescension of Moses was a preview of the great self-emptying of the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:5–11). As always, the path to the crown leads through the cross.
4. **Eternal priorities:** Rejecting the treasures of Egypt to gain eternal reward, v. 26. Moses, as the crown-prince, could have had wealth, power, and pleasure. Yet, he forsook it all because he had his eyes on eternal reward.
5. **Single-minded focus:** By faith, to focus on Christ and flee the world, v. 27 (see 1 Tim. 6:11–12). Note that both "*not fearing*" and "*he endured*" are the result of preoccupation with Christ.
6. **Total reliance:** By faith, trusting in the promise and the blood, v. 28. This was the "*by grace through faith*" moment of Israel! The Passover looked forward to "*The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29, 36). The "rest" of redemption left nothing for the children of Israel to do. The second "rest," of the promised land, required them to fight for it (cf. Matt. 11:28–30; Heb. 4:3, 11).
7. **Victorious courage:** By faith, to face the impossible and prevail, v. 29. We find out what faith we truly have when we face the impossible. Every believer will face a "Red Sea" experience. At that point, there is nothing we can do but pray and "*Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord*" (Exod. 14:13).

Summary

1. Moses' secret to greatness began with his humility (Num. 12:3).
2. Out of his humility, Moses developed faithfulness (Heb. 3:2, 5).
3. Moses was a man of prayer, as demonstrated in Psalm 90.
4. Because of his intimate fellowship with God, Moses not only did the works of God, but he understood God's ways (Psa. 103:7; see also Exod. 33:13).

STUDY SEVEN: THE EXAMPLE OF PAUL (1 Corinthians 9:24–27; Philippians 3:7–16)

"Imitate me, just as I imitate Christ." 1 Corinthians 11:1

Paul's Steps to Apostleship (Acts 9–13)

The stages of Paul's growth into his apostolic role are quite instructive for every believer. There are many good reasons why this spiritual journey from "Saul of Tarsus" to "Paul the apostle" are recorded for us, and we should recognize them as we study what it means to "*imitate*" his life.

1. God has a plan for every believer, which was ordained from before the world began (Jer. 1:5; Eph. 1:3–6).
2. With the coming of the Church Age, every believer has been uniquely gifted by the Holy Spirit for the part we are to play (Rom. 12:3–8; Eph. 4:8, 11–12).
3. Unlike most of us, Paul was informed of his gift (apostleship) soon after his salvation (Acts 9:15–16; Gal. 1:15–16).
4. Immediately after coming to faith, Paul was identified simply as a **brother** (Acts 9:17). He was simply one of many believers.
5. Very soon after this, we see him being a **witness** to the Gospel, as he continued to grow in strength and wisdom (Acts 9:20, 22).
6. We next find him identified as a **disciple** in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26–29), as he continued to preach Christ.
7. After some years, Barnabas sought him out in Tarsus, to be a **teacher** in Antioch, which became the first missionary center (Acts 11:19–26).
8. Saul (Paul) was later listed among the "*prophets and teachers*" in Antioch (Acts 13:1). Interestingly, he is mentioned last, indicating his inferior position.
9. The Holy Spirit then set apart "Barnabas and Saul" for the first **missionary** journey (Acts 13:2). Note again that Barnabas is in the prominent position while Saul is subordinate.
10. Not until a moment of crisis, where Saul (Paul) stepped up and did what no one else could do, is he listed in the dominant position (Acts 13:8–13). Paul, like all of us, had to grow spiritually and practically, before he was ready to fill the position as **apostle** that God had planned for him.

Winning the Inner Prize (Philippians 3:7–16)

This is the struggle for mastery **by** Christ. It is the battle against the natural tendency of self-exaltation, that is an expression of the sin nature passed down from Adam. As with Moses (Heb. 11:23–29), a series of spiritual decisions had to be made:

1. There had to be a rejection of the former life (Phil. 3:1–6). Regeneration is the creation of a "new man," and this begins a "new life" (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:20–24) that is grounded in **humility** (submission), rather than arrogance.
2. This must be followed by the setting of **spiritual priorities**, which are Christ-centered (Phil. 3:7–8).
3. On the basis of these new priorities, a concrete **decision** for life must be made, in order to live according to these goals (Phil. 3:9–11).
4. This once-for-all decision will result in **actions** in accord with our goals (Phil. 3:12–14).
5. The end **results** will be a life of power and influence on others, who will be motivated by our impact, and will choose to follow in our steps (Phil. 3:15–17). The inner battle must be won before we can ever hope to win the outer battle!

Winning the Earthly Prize (1 Corinthians 9:9–23)

This is a struggle of mastery **through** Christ. Paul relied on the power of the Spirit of God to serve all men as those for whom Christ died (2 Cor. 5:14–23). As he followed the example of Christ (Matt. 20:26–28; 1 Cor. 11:1), he willingly gave up the right to claim monetary support, working with his own hands to supply his ministry (Acts 20:33–35), and to gain his “reward” (1 Cor. 9:17) by offering his ministry “without charge” (1 Cor. 9:18). This resulted in the winning of many to Christ (1 Cor. 9:19–23).

Winning the Eternal Prize (1 Corinthians 9:24–27)

This is a struggle of mastery **for** Christ. From the spiritual stronghold, which Paul erected in his own soul, he was able to live a life of extreme discipline and sacrifice. The “*prize*” he sought in Philippians 3:14, motivated him to live in such a way as to “*obtain ... an imperishable crown*” (1 Cor. 9:19–27). Paul knew that, just as Moses’ sin of unbelief had cost him the right to enter into the promised land (Num. 20:7–12; Deut. 34:1–6), so his own failure to live a sanctified life could disqualify him from winning the crown he greatly prized (1 Cor. 9:27).

Summary

1. If we would follow Paul’s example, we must first grow into our own God-given ministry (Acts 9–13).
2. As we grow, we must seek to be mastered by Christ (Phil. 3:7–16).
3. This will enable us to have maximum effect in winning others to Christ (1 Cor. 9:9–23).
4. By consistent and diligent subordination to the will and work of God (Phil. 2:12–13), we can be assured that we will obtain the crown (1 Cor. 9:24–27).

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” 2 Timothy 4:7–8

STUDY EIGHT: THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST (Matt. 20:28; John 13:13–17; Phil. 2:5–11)

“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” Matthew 11:29–30

“But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him, and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus.” Ephesians 4:20–21

If we truly desire to win the crown, to stand before our Lord and hear Him say, “*well done, good and faithful servant*” (Matt. 25:21, 23), there is no greater example we can follow than that of Jesus Christ Himself. The lives of all of the great believers in history pale in comparison to His glorious life. To follow His example, however faltering our attempts may be, is to ensure our

gradual transformation into the likeness of His image (Rom. 8:29; 12:1–2; 2 Cor. 3:17–18). While each believer has to find his/her own path on this journey, the following are a few guideposts to keep us on track.

Begin with the Mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5–8)

Everything in life begins and ends, succeeds or fails, due to attitude. Attitude is everything. Our attitude will always determine our altitude in life. Here, Paul—the keenest student of Christ, presents a look into His very mind. In doing so, he gives us a series of mental steps to take to achieve genuine Christ-likeness.

1. **Begin with complete surrender to God:** “*Let this mind be in you ...*” (v. 5).
The imperative, “*Let ... be,*” is what we might call a permissive imperative. We cannot make this happen; we can only permit it to be done in us by surrender to the Holy Spirit of God.
2. **Voluntarily relinquish your claim on yourself:** “*did not consider ...*” (v. 6).
The verb *hegeomai* is in the middle voice. Christ chose not to claim His due. He demands the same of us when he says, “*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him **deny himself**, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me*” (Luke 9:23).
3. **Condescend to the role of voluntary slave:** “*taking the form of a bondservant ...*” (v. 7).
What great condescension is this—to go from the form of God to the “form of man?” For us, this means to adopt the mind-set of those who are “*poor in spirit*” (Matt. 5:3). The Lord Jesus, as a man, became the “*pierced-ear slave*” of the Father (Exod. 21:6; Psa. 40:6–8; Heb. 10:5–7). The phrase, “*My ears You have opened*” (Psa. 40:6) is literally, “*My ears You have pierced.*”
4. **Seek obedience to God as your highest prize on earth:** “*became obedient ...*” (v. 8b).
Remember that even the God-man “*Learned obedience by the things which He suffered*” (Heb. 5:8). All suffering in the life of the believer is a test of obedience!
5. **Be faithful even unto death:** “*even the death of the cross*” (v. 8b).
There was no more shameful way to die than on a cross. As we saw in the message to the church of Smyrna, “*Be faithful until death, and I will give you a crown of life*” (Rev. 2:10). A great part of victory in life is the commitment to endure to the death. “*And they overcame him [antichrist and the devil] by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives even to the death*” (Rev. 12:11).

It is essential that we allow—give permission to the Holy Spirit—to infuse into us “*the mind of Christ*” (1 Cor. 2:12–16).

The Servant-King

“*Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*” Matthew 20:28

It was the “*mind of Christ*” that produced the life of Christ. As we read of Jesus in the Upper Room with His disciples on His last night with them, we see emphasis placed on what Jesus knew, as the basis for all that He did.

*“Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus **knew** that His hour had come [**knowing**] that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end [uttermost] ... Jesus, **knowing** that the Father had given all things into His hand, and [**knowing**] that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments (just as He had laid aside His glory, Phil. 2:5–9) ... for He **knew** who would betray Him ...”* John 13:1, 3–4, 11

My dear friend, Dr. Radmacher—now with the Lord—used to say, “*Jesus did what He did because He knew what He knew.*” Ultimately, it is what we know, with absolute certainty (or think we know), that influences what we do! If we would follow the Lord Jesus, let us strive to be servants!

Running the Race (Hebrews 12:1–3)

“Looking unto Jesus ... who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:2

These three verses, at the beginning of Hebrews 12, are filled with powerful incentive for us to run our race and win the prize of eternal reward. We will look at only five things:

1. We are a part of a glorious story being told through history. The phrase “*we also*” (v. 1) links us to all the great heroes of faith recorded in Hebrews 11. We are not just a part of history; we each hold a unique place in His story!
2. We first need to become disentangled from the weights of this world. “*Let us lay aside every weight*” is an urgent exhortation, in which the author (Paul) includes himself. Life has many weights and entanglements. Paul reminds us that, “*No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier*” (2 Tim. 2:4).
3. Our individual race will require discipline and endurance if we are to finish. “*Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us ...*” (v. 1a). We each have a different race. We run in different lanes. Don’t get distracted by the other runners. Run your own race, with a quick start off the line, a sustained effort through the course, and a strong finish!
4. We, too, can be sustained against the trials and sorrows of this life by a deep inner joy of what lies ahead. “*Who for the joy that was set before Him ...*” (v. 2). The joy of winning the eternal blessing and presence of each and every believer sustained our Lord on the cross. He “*endured*” His great agony because He was thinking of you! Can you not also endure for the joy of finishing the race at His feet?

5. The key to it all is in spiritual focus: *“looking unto Jesus ... consider Him ... lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls”* (vv. 2–3). We need to learn to “keep our eyes on the prize.” Ultimately, it is not the reward or the crown itself that is the prize. It will be our ability to lay something at the feet of our precious Savior that will make it all worthwhile!

“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win!”

1 Corinthians 9:24