

DEGREES OF REWARD IN HEAVEN?

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. We are asking the question: Will there be degrees of reward in heaven? Does the Bible teach there will be degrees of reward in heaven? Will some people, for some reason or reasons, enjoy a greater reward in heaven than other people will enjoy there?
2. Some people believe the Bible teaches both degrees of punishment in hell and degrees of reward in heaven.
3. On the other hand, there are many who believe there will be degrees of punishment in hell, yet reject the idea of degrees of reward in heaven. However, it seems to me that the two would go together.
4. I, of course, do not believe the Bible teaches either idea. In a previous less we studied the former. In this lesson, we are studying degrees of reward in heaven.
5. In this lesson we are interested not only in what the Bible actually teaches on the subject, but also in what men believe about it, why they believe it, and how they seek to justify what they believe about it.
6. Let us begin with:

II. DISCUSSION

A. PASSAGES WHICH OBVIOUSLY TEACH A COMMON REWARD.

1. Mt.19:28-20:16, and the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard.
 - a. The kingdom is said to be like unto that which is described in this parable, which is designed to further explain the last few verses of Ch.19.
 - b. All who make the necessary sacrifices for the Lord's name's sake, and faithfully follow him shall have the same reward – the same inheritance – everlasting life, 19:29.
 - c. As further illustrated in the Parable all laborers, whether hired early or late, receive the same wage, Vv.8-10.

- d. Cf. 19:30; 20:16; See 20:8,14,16.
 - e. All laborers will receive a reward far greater than they deserve – a reward which will show the goodness of the Master noted in 20:15.
2. Rom.2:6,7,10,11.
- a. Notice what is promised: “eternal life,” further described as “glory, honor, peace, and immortality,” Vv.7b,10a. Cf. Jno.3:16-18,36.
 - b. Notice to whom promised and on what basis: Vv.7a, 10b,c,6.
 - c. A common reward. The same to one and all on the same basis.
 - d. How can there be degrees of immortality? of eternal life? of eternal glory? of peace in heaven?
3. Rom.6:23b.
- a. This gift is based on and offered to any and all of those who by faith meet the conditions described in Ch.6 – i.e., those who by faith are baptized into Jesus Christ, having obeying from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered them, being then made free from sin and becoming servants of righteousness, and by maintaining that faith to the end.
 - b. Common faith, common reward!
4. 2Cor.2:15, “For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved...”
- a. Are there different degrees of salvation? How could there be?
 - b. Cf. Mk.16:15,16; 1Cor.1:21; 15:1,2; Heb.5:8,9.
5. 1Cor.15:42-44,51-54, commonality in reward is evident, is it not?
- a. Are there degrees in incorruption?
 - b. Are there different degrees of power or strength in the resurrected bodies in heaven?
 - c. Are there degrees of glorious bodies? Cf. 1Jno.3:2,3; Phil.3:20,21.
 - d. Will some spiritual bodies be more spiritual than others?
 - e. Are there graduations of immortality?
 - f. Any notion of degrees of reward in heaven robs 1Cor.15 of every shred of power and hope of the weak and powerless of this world!

6. 2Th.1:6-10.
 - a. All the troubled, the believers, will be recompensed the same thing: “rest” i.e., eternal rest.
 - b. Recompensed on the same bases to one an all: by faith obeying the gospel and knowing God.
 - c. Are there different degrees of “eternal rest”? or of eternal life?
7. 2Tim.4:8, common reward once again taught.
 - a. There is no distinction between the reward in store for the apostle Paul and that in store for other. For both it’s “a crown of righteousness”—a crown belonging to the righteous.
 - b. Nor is there a distinction between the basis upon which each one is promised the reward: it’s promised to “all them also (apostle and saint alike) that love his (the Lord’s) appearing.” Cf. 1Jno.5:3.
8. 1Pet.1:3-5,9.
 - a. Notice what is promised, V.4.
 - b. To whom it is promised and by what means, Vv.3,5,9.
 - c. Commonality of reward is again evident!

B. PASSAGES ERRONEOUSLY THOUGHT TO TEACH DEGREES OF REWARD IN HEAVEN.

1. The Parable of the Pounds (Lk.19:11-27) is thought by some to teach degrees of reward in heaven.
 - a. Without going into detail to show how and how not to interpret parables in order to prove this parable does not teach degrees of reward in heaven, we shall simply call your attention to a few things pertaining to the parable vital to our subject.
 - b. The specific lesson intended in this parable is basically the same as that of the Parable of the Talents in Mt.25, namely individual responsibility for ability for what one is given.
 - (1) And the details or elements of the narrative used to develop the story of the parable should not be strained into any other meaning.
 - (2) If we do that we create many problems.

- (3) For instance: The pound of the one-pound-man is taken from him and given to the ten-pound-man, over the protest of the servants (V.25), leaving the one-pound-man with nothing.
- (4) Does this mean that one man will receive the benefits of another man's downfall in heaven?
- c. There is another obvious truth we face if we hold that the Parable of the Pounds teaches degrees of reward in heaven. We put it in direct conflict with the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Mt.20:1-16) and force a contradiction in God's word. God forbid!
- 2. 1Cor.3:13-15 is another, so the Baptist people teach. Especially, their perversion of V.15.

C. THE BASIS ON WHICH SOME SEEK TO JUSTIFY THE IDEA OF DEGREES OF REWARD IN HEAVEN.

- 1. Some do it solely on the basis of human reasoning or human logic rather than scriptural exegesis. For instance:
- 2. Often, those who believe this doctrine argue that preachers, elders and others who work long and hard will have the greater reward in heaven. (This argument indicates that such earned them the greater reward.) Cf. Mt.20:1-16, The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard.
- 3. Or, "It is neither logical nor just to say that a person dying in infancy will receive the same reward as the apostle Paul who worked so long and so hard and suffered so much for Christ." (Again, an argument indicating that longer time of service and harder labor and more suffering has earned for them greater reward in heaven.) (Human reasoning and fallacious logic, not scripture.) Cf. Mt.20:1-16.
- 4. "Two people attend the same classical concert. One has a love for music, but has an untrained ear. The other has extensive training in the field of classical music. Both enjoy the concert, but the degree of enjoyment is greatest in the person with the greatest preparation." (Again, greater effort to prepare for the reward has evidently earned it for them over an above others who did not take the time or make the effort.) Cf. 1Cor.9:24-27.
- 5. "The Bible teaches that heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. So the Bible teaches that the person who

works the hardest and longest will enjoy heaven more than anyone else because he is the best prepared for it.”

6. The true basis for this type of reasoning in justifying various degrees of reward in heaven is actually meritorious works, which is an erroneous concept and doctrine emphatically condemned in the Scriptures. Cf. The Parable of the Talents; the Parable of the Pounds; Rom.4:4,5.
7. Consider the argument about music appreciation.
 - a. This is not a valid comparison to Bible teaching.
 - b. Some people are beyond the ability to sing well. Will these inabilities and handicaps be carried over into heaven? Will they be denied some of the joys in heaven because of such earthly inabilities and earthly handicaps?
 - c. If this is true, then the deaf and dumb will be handicapped throughout eternity because he never developed the proper appreciation for some of God’s blessings here on earth, and that through no fault of his own!
8. The notion that those who “work the hardest and longest” in the Lord’s service here on earth will enjoy heaven more than others is also ridiculous.
 - a. If means that infants will remain infants throughout eternity and be unable to enjoy heaven to its fullest.
 - b. It means that the Christian who lived to be 90 years of age will be happier than the Christian who died at the age of 25 years.
 - c. Are those who die in youth cheated out of some of the joys of heaven all because they had no control over the time of their death?
 - d. Absolutely not! The difficulties and handicaps of earthly life will all be swept away in heaven. The handicaps of situation, age, mental ability, vocal ability, wealth, unfortunate marriage, circumstances of birth, sickness and a thousand and one other things, will be lost or swept away in our heavenly home.
 - e. To imply that apostles, elders, preachers and others will be at the top of the heap, in finer mansions than the rest, and with everyone else sitting on the back seat of the heavenly meeting house is simply not true!

- f. We must never be guilty of leaving the impression with the unfortunate and the down-trodden that their misfortune will for one reason or another be carried over into heaven. In heaven there will be no shades of sadness or degrees of reward for some greater than for others.

D. THE CROWN OF LIFE – TO WHOM PROMISED?

1. Rev.2:10.
 - a. All who are faithful are promised the same thing, same reward: “a crown of life.”
 - b. Will one crown of life be less rewarding or less enjoyable than another?
2. Jas.1:12.
 - a. This crown is not promised as a bonus award to successful Christians, while others are saved, but without bonus points, or saved, but without a crown.
 - b. This crown was to those that love him. Cf. 1Jno.5:3.
3. 2Tim.4:6-8.
 - a. Paul is not promised this crown because of faithfulness above that of the ordinary Christians.
 - b. This crown of righteousness, a crown belonging to the righteous, is promised to any and all who are righteous, or all who practice righteousness.
 - c. This crown is also promised to “all them that love his appearing.”
4. 1Cor.9:24-27.
 - a. All who enter and faithfully run the race receive the same thing – the incorruptible crown.
 - c. Cf. 1Pet.1:3-5,9; Rom.2:6-11.

III. CONCLUSION

1. We have shown there are passages that teach a common reward.
2. We have examined certain passages erroneously thought to teach degrees of reward and shown the consequences of so teaching.
3. We have exposed the fallacy of the basis of some who seek to justify degrees of reward on the basis of human reasoning rather than scriptural exegesis.
4. And we have briefly considered to whom “the crown of life” and/or “the crown of righteousness” is promised.