

Eternal Rewards and the Bible

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A consistent theme throughout the Bible - is the call for individuals to serve God (See Ex 23:25, Jn 12:26, Col 3:24, etc.). He has clearly decided to employ people in the promotion of His agenda. And the service is as varied as is human activity. He compensates for this service with ... eternal rewards. *“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me”* (Rev 22:12). No one knows exactly what these rewards are, but they are waiting on the other side of The Judgment. We do know they are safe and incorruptible. *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth ... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal”* (Mt 6:19,20). We also know they surpass comprehension. *“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him”* (1Cor 2:9). Those who take God up on this offer do so by faith. They believe God is willing to do this, able to do this ... and keeps impeccable records - knowing who did what.

For two summers, I was a door-to-door salesman. The goal was to work as many hours as possible, live on as little as possible, and send all monies back to headquarters. Then at summer's end - pick up one big paycheck. The procurement of eternal rewards is somewhat similar. We are looking to one big Payday. *“Well done, good slave. Because you have been faithful in a very little thing, be in authority over ten cities”* (Lk 19:17).

The case for dismissing “rights” to eternal rewards for anybody is quite strong. For starters, *“Salvation is from the Lord”* (Jonah 2:9). While Jonah was probably referring to deliverance from the belly of the great fish, those with even a cursory Bible understanding know that *“to God the Lord belong escapes from death”* (Ps 68:20). Our most urgent need is deliverance from the deaths of sin - **all three of them**; spiritual, physical and eternal. But, on our own initiative *“there is none who seeks for God”* (Ro 3:11). Jesus said, *“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him”* (Jn 6:44). The Bible is absolute on this issue. Scores of verses support this. If you think you are going to stand before God and say, *“Yeah, I woke up one day and knew I needed You in my life. I started reading the Bible and I figured out who Jesus was and what that meant. Then I decided to accept Him, and I ... I ... I ...”* Let me break it to you this way. If you think you engineered your faith and understanding of the things of God - you have deceived yourself. So, such a one has “rights” to eternal rewards?

But, even as Christians, we cannot claim total credit for our service. We do become *“God's fellow-workers”* with each receiving *“his own reward according to his own labor”* (1Cor 3:8,9). But, deep behind the scenes of our willing service, we find these assertions: *“We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, **which God prepared beforehand**, that we should walk in them”* (Eph 2:10) and *“it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure”* (Phil 2:13). So, God creates the works and motivates us to do them ... and even spiritually equips us (1Cor 12:4-31) ... and then grants eternal rewards for cooperating?

Notice He says we “should” walk in these good works. But, in an exercise of free will, we can stupidly choose otherwise. John told his audience, *“Watch yourselves, ... (so) that you might receive a full reward”* (2Jn 8).

Everyone who gets even one eternal reward will acknowledge it is undeserved. It is He “*who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist*” (Ro 4:17). He not only makes us “*alive together with Him*” (Col2:13) - but then He makes our subsequent labors actually accomplish something. It is “*God who causes the growth*” (1Cor3:7).

So, are there “conditions” one must meet to be used by God - and thus receive eternal rewards? Well, John would not have exhorted his audience, “*watch yourselves ... (so) that you might receive a full reward*” if these rewards were automatic. Jesus would not have warned of the wicked slave who “hid” his talent ... unless it is possible we could do the same (Mt 25:14-30). In Revelation, He admonished the churches to “*repent ... be faithful ... overcome ... hold fast*” and rewards would follow (Rev 2:5,10,17,25). Paul warned Christians to build properly on the foundation, as fire “*will test the quality of each man’s work*” - some efforts ending in eternal reward and others burning up (1Cor3:10,13-15). So, here are a few points.

To be used by God is a **moment by moment, event by event, transaction**. God is not obligated to use everything a Christian does. An individual must actively maintain the relationship with God - in actions and reactions. His will must be sought and one must be deemed by Him as ready to be used. There is nothing automatic about this, and the privilege is **never owed**. It is an undeserved honor to ever be used by God - *even once in this life*. One’s educational level, titles, or publically ordained positions have no effect on the God of the Bible in this matter. He uses individuals based upon **current standing** with Him - and this is always a matter of the heart. For example, while there are many sins that move a person into an “inactive” status with Him, one that God hates ... is pride. “*If anyone thinks he is something, being nothing, he deceives himself*” (Gal 6:3). Pride is often a very subtle wickedness that remains undetected until some event brings it to the fore (Just ask Job). Then, one must spend time repenting and getting the heart right ... so God can then use that person. In this matter, “*God shows no partiality.*” (Paul said this of the other apostles “*who were of high reputation*”!) Rest assured, when Peter and Barnabas, were operating in their pride, that chapter of their Christian lives only produced fuel for the fire [Gal 2:6-9]). Do you think God is somehow obligated to eternally reward error and impure motives, known or unknown by the perpetrator, and expand His Kingdom with that?

But, what if there is a group of Christians - say, a local church - representing God? Is He obligated to use, and reward, their efforts? Or, are its activities weighed moment by moment, event by event ... as is done with the individual?

Let’s look at it this way. Have you ever been told, “*If you don’t give to the church, how are the bills supposed to be paid?*” Well, there are **two presumptions** behind this question/statement. First, God is using the activity of that particular church and, second, the bills are now the responsibility of those in the pew. But, ... is God using that place - now? Even if He has in the past, that doesn’t mean He is **now** ... and the present is all that matters. This fundamental question - and present-tense test - never goes away. And, what about those bills? Well, we already know of at least one place God had inhabited - and then abandoned. Somewhere around 35 AD, He left the Most Holy Place at the Temple in Jerusalem ... never to return. Of course, people still came to the Temple, and it was populated with priests, and councils, and all kinds of religious ceremonies for another 35 years. During that time ... all the bills for that “ministry” kept rolling in. Did those “investments” by those “parishioners” end in eternal rewards?

If individuals, or groups, want investment into their ministry(s), they should look primarily to God Himself to impress on potential donors the validity of their cause. God is quite capable of doing that - and has no need of coercion or manipulation. He simply opens eyes ... to the opportunity of gaining eternal rewards by investing.

In my own personal crucible, I have come to some determinations. One is this: *“Lord, I would rather be used by You **one time** in my remaining days, than to have a lifetime of plastic ‘achievement’ - pursuing what I think, or others think, should be done.”* This takes effort to seek God on such a level ... but, what is the alternative? Fuel for fire?

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