

The Nature of Rewards and Inheritances

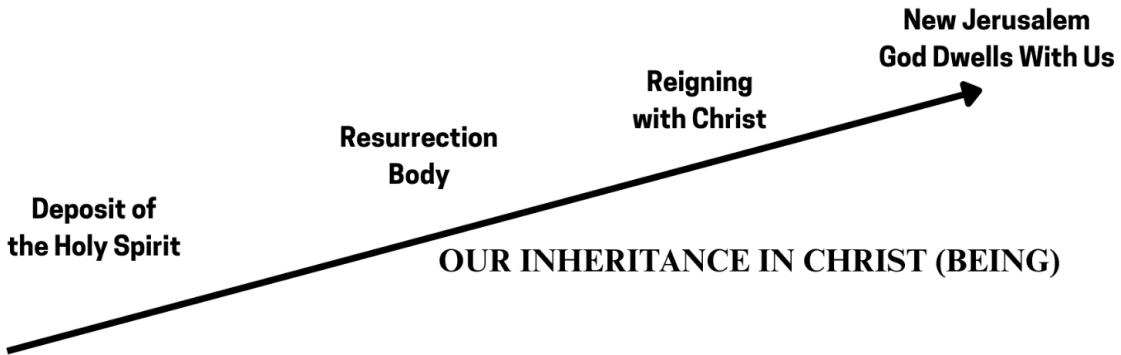
Billy Graham: "Heaven doesn't make this life less important; it makes it more important."

The New Testament, and particularly the teaching of Jesus Christ, give us two main incentives for practicing uncompromising Christian virtue in a hostile world. The first is the rewards that we earn; and the second is an inheritance that we are given because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. On one hand, rewards seem to mainly be given at the return of Jesus Christ, prior to the Millennium and involve houses, lands and authority in Christ's Millennial Kingdom (Matthew 19:27-30). On the other hand, the inheritance is something we start experiencing now, with the deposit of the Holy Spirit, and which continues through the Millennium and is perfected in the Eternal State.

The following diagram illustrates my current understanding of how things work. There are four stages: The Present Evil Age (which includes the Great Tribulation), The Return of Christ, The Millennium, and the Eternal State. Rewards are gained through faithful obedience, godliness, right doctrine, suffering and martyrdom during the present evil age and especially during the Tribulation. The rewards are given when the Righteous Judge (Jesus) appears and awards them on the basis of our deeds. Some of these rewards are enjoyed during the Millennium when we get houses, lands and cities to rule over, others seem to be eternal in nature.

On the other hand, our inheritance is spiritual and we start inheriting it as soon as we are saved which is when we receive the deposit of the Holy Spirit as an earnest of what is to come (Ephesians 1:13,14). We then inherit the Resurrection Body at Christ's return, and we reign and rule with Christ during the Millennium. Finally, in the eternal state, we inherit the New Jerusalem, when God dwells with humans. The inheritance is a free gift. However, like many modern inheritances it has conditions and qualifications (the unrighteous do not inherit). We inherit by receiving the things of Christ by faith because of what Christ has done upon the Cross. We inherit the Kingdom of God prepared for us from the foundation of the world. Much of this is predestined by the Father, e.g. who will sit at Christ's right hand and who at His left. Indeed, we become co-heirs with Christ, who inherits both the spiritual and physical Universe!

PRESENT EVIL AGE | RETURN OF CHRIST | MILLENNIUM | ETERNAL STATE



OUR REWARDS FROM CHRIST (DOING)

**Earned by Obedience
In This Life**

**Awarded by Christ
At His Return**

**Enjoyed on Earth
During the Millennium**

Our “dull, daily life” becomes extremely meaningful once we realize that our actions can gain eternal rewards, and that even our smallest acts of kindness can gain an eternal reward:

Matthew 10:42 *And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”*

God notices even our smallest and most obscure (“in secret”) good deeds, and will reward us for them:

Matthew 6:3-4 *But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, (4) so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

Even our suffering can bring us glory in the age to come!

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 *So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. (17) For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, (18) as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*

Should We Believe in Eternal Rewards?

Liberal theologians have rationalized away the Christian’s reward and the Christian’s inheritance and made the faith all about morality, spirituality and lifestyle in the present life. The Moral Majority took things in an opposite direction, making evangelicalism all about present things such as relationships, marriage, family and a godly society. The doctrine of the Rapture has taught Christians that a major reward is escaping prior to suffering and not enduring through afflictions to become a blessed martyr of the Lord Jesus Christ with a great heavenly reward. Here are some of the objections to the idea of heavenly rewards and the biblical response to these objections:

- A) There is a surprisingly common teaching that we should NOT look for, or even expect, any heavenly rewards, but instead just do everything out of love for God. However, true faith expects a reward from God!

Hebrews 11:6 *But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and **that He is a rewarder** of those who diligently seek Him.*

.
The Greek word for “a rewarder” is “misthapodotes” and means reward-giver, paymaster, a giver of wages that are appropriately due. The person of faith believes that God will reward their hard labor in the Lord! Thus, believing in a God who rewards us, is a central part of having faith in the goodness and justice of God. A belief in a God who rewards is found throughout Scripture:

First reference in Scripture: Genesis 15:1 *After these things the Word of Jehovah came to Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram, I am your shield and your exceeding great reward.*

Last reference in Scripture: Revelation 22:12 *And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to each according as his works.*

- B) Another objection is that seeking after rewards is “of works” and that everything is “of grace” and that we are unworthy sinners who cannot make any claims on God, let alone be rewarded

for anything. That is only true when it concerns our initial justification, and indeed our salvation is a free gift. It is by grace through faith alone, that no one should boast. However, once we are saved, once we are a new creation, we are made to do good works that have been prepared beforehand for us to do, and we will be rewarded for doing those good works and for bearing fruit.

Ephesians 2:8-10 *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, (9) not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (10) For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

Our reward is so precious and so central to the Christian life that we are exhorted not to lose it:

Hebrews 10:35-36 *Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. (36) For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.*

2 John 1:7-8 *For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. (8) Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.*

C) A final objection to the whole of idea of rewards and inheritances is that we would just be pursuing our own self-interest and that we would be seeking the gift and not the Giver.

However, it is God Himself who is telling us to do this! God knows that when we seek the reward, it will be by doing His revealed will, and as a result we will also have a much deeper relationship with God. Many Christians can testify that when they went out to do the will of God in evangelism, charity work or missions, that moment is the moment their relationship with God improved. All of God's creatures from cats to giraffes have innate self-interest, and it is when they innocently pursue that self-interest that they most glorify God, according to the nature that He has given to each of them.

Many of the heroes of faith, became men and women of God by seeking the reward of God, rather than the rewards of this earthly life:

Hebrews 11:24-26 *By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, (25) choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. (26) He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.*

If the great saints of God such as Abraham, Moses and the apostle Paul lived with the rewards of God in view then we should not feel too spiritual to copy their example!

2 Timothy 4:7-8 *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: (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.*

Timing

Most of our rewards are given “in this age” (Mark 10:29,30) where “in this age” includes the Millennium / the Regeneration where life will be similar to life now, and the reward seems to be possessions, lands, cities and authority.

Matthew 19:27-30 *Then answering Peter said to Him, Behold, we have forsaken all and have followed You. Therefore what shall we have? (28) And Jesus said to them, Truly I say to you that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of His glory, you also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (29) And everyone who left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. (30) But many who are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.*

These Millennial rewards will be given in the regeneration (Matthew 19:28), “at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:14) after we have faced the judgement seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10) when our worthwhile works (gold, silver, precious tomes) will be tested and rewarded, and our worthless deeds (wood, hay and stubble) be burned up (1 Corinthians 3:5-15). However, even a Christian with a worthless life will be saved as through fire (1 Corinthians 3:15).

Every Christian will face the judgment seat of Christ, even the apostle Paul said that he would face it (2 Corinthians 5:10, 1 Corinthians 4:1-5)! This judgement seat of Christ is not for salvation, for Christian believers have passed out of judgment, from death to life (Romans 8:1,2 John 5:22-24). The judgment seat of Christ determines our eternal reward. We are judged for our deeds in the body, whether good or evil.

Therefore, what we do in this life, in the body, determines our reward in Christ’s Millennial Kingdom and our status once we get there.

Spiritual Inheritances

In contrast, the inheritance is not a reward for good works given at a single point in time, it is a gift ongoing for all of eternity, it starts with Christ in us, the hope of glory. It then continues in an ages-long process of glorification and exaltation, where we take on divine qualities and authority in Christ and become the true dwelling place of God. The inheritance is ours because we are sons and daughters of the Living God, and our life is hidden in Christ with God. When Christ is revealed we will be revealed with Him in glory (Colossians 3:1-4).

Our spiritual inheritance begins as soon as we become born-again, receive the Holy Spirit and are sealed with the Holy Spirit as the guarantee of our inheritance (Ephesians 1:13,14). The inheritance is not earned in the same way that a spiritual reward is earned. It is an inheritance, and no one earns an inheritance. The money for the inheritance is earned by the Father, who passes it along to His children. That said however, there are conditions and qualifications. We can be disqualified from our inheritance. The unrighteous do not inherit the Kingdom of God!

Ephesians 5:5 *For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.*

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 *Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, (10) nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.*

The idea of putting a condition on an inheritance is ancient. If Very Rich Uncle says to his niece “You will inherit ten million dollars providing you graduate from college with a 3.5+ GPA”. The niece is not earning the ten million dollars. That wealth was earned earlier on by Very Rich Uncle. The niece qualifies for the inheritance, which she did not earn, by meeting the condition of her graduating from college with 3.5+ GPA. Is the gift still of grace? Absolutely. It is the gracious gift of her uncle. Is it still a gift? Absolutely! However, it is a gift with a condition attached to it! Do other college students with the exact same GPA automatically get the same amount of money? No, not at all. The niece has been chosen, elected and graciously appointed to receive a completely unearned inheritance providing she meets the condition of graduating with a 3.5+ GPA.

Alice Walton, the Walmart heiress, has an estimated net worth of \$116 billion. Alice Walton did not work for that inheritance, she did not found Walmart, she did not work at Walmart as an executive, she inherited a fortune because of her relationship with her father. We will have a much greater inheritance through our relationship with our gracious and good Heavenly Father!

God has an inheritance for us, it is eternal, undefiled and protected in the heavenly realms (1 Peter 1:3-5). We become co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:16,17), and Christ inherits all things in the heavens and upon the earth (Colossians 1:15-17, Hebrews 1:1,2). Our inheritance includes eternal life (Matthew 19:29,30), the deposit of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13,14), the resurrection body (1 Corinthians 15:50-54), reigning and ruling with Christ during the Millennium when the meek inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5), the kingdom prepared for us from before the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34), and dwelling in the New Jerusalem during the eternal state (Revelation 21:1-4). All the promises of God are “yea and amen” in Christ! (2 Corinthians 1:20)

This inheritance is by promise. It is often called “the promised inheritance” (Galatians 3:18, Hebrews 9:15, James 2:5), that it might be fully of grace. Do we earn this inheritance? No, it was earned beforehand by the work of Christ on the Cross, and is now given to us as a free gift, so that he can call us His brothers and sisters (Hebrews 2:11) in the heavenly realms, as citizens of heaven and sons and heirs of God (Galatians 4:6,7; Romans 8:16,17).

Titus 3:4-7 *But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, (5) he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, (6) whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, (7) so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

While the inheritance is fully of grace, yet it is through faith and patience that we inherit the promises:

Hebrews 6:11-12 *And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, (12) so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*

Men and women are co-heirs of salvation (1 Peter 3:7) and race and social status are irrelevant as there is neither Jew or Gentile, slave or free (Galatians 3:25-29, Ephesians 3:6). The inheritance is for the saints (Acts 20:32, Ephesians 1:18, Colossians 1:12) and ,as we saw earlier the unrighteous do not inherit. One interesting thought here is that while the Prodigal was welcomed back in the Father’s house, the elder brother ended up with all the Father’s property, while the Prodigal son, who had destroyed his inheritance, ended up with nothing (Luke 15:31). So, it seems that repentant backsliders can still be saved, yet without an inheritance.

An inheritance is given entirely at the Father’s sovereign will, to whomever He chooses, whether it is sitting at the right hand of Jesus (Matthew 20:23), the gift the Kingdom to the little flock (Luke 12:32) or when the righteous finally inherit the Kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34). Our rewards are given to us individually, they are not for membership of a certain group or church, we stand before God alone: **2 Corinthians 5:10** *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.*