

Rewards and Inheritances

God's Glorious Plan for Your Eternal Life

By John Edmiston



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PREFACE

The purpose of this Bible study ebook is to inform believers of the great rewards that accompany a faithful, well-lived Christian life and the glory of the inheritance that is to come. To help them overcome worldliness, and to motivate them to Christian service and holiness.

They were written as a response to the social and theological contexts created by the heretical Prosperity Gospel. They are also a response to liberal theology which scorns the whole idea of heavenly rewards and inheritances as philosophically naïve. However, rewards and inheritances are clearly taught by Jesus and the apostles and prophets from Genesis to Revelation!

As we approach the time of the Great Tribulation many Christians are being persecuted all over the world especially in places such as Nigeria and Pakistan. Christians all over the world will need to understand their heavenly rewards and inheritance in order to remain steadfast and immovable in the Lord:

1 Corinthians 15:57-58 *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (58) Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

These studies were written for those who love to study Scripture and get into all the details. There are many cross-references which you can look up as you go along. Take your time. Feel free to teach them in your church, bible studies, home groups, cell groups and Bible colleges. There is no restriction on their use and they may be freely reproduced and distributed for non-profit ministry purposes. There are some suggested discussion questions for each chapter at the back of this ebook.

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The Nature of Rewards and Inheritances

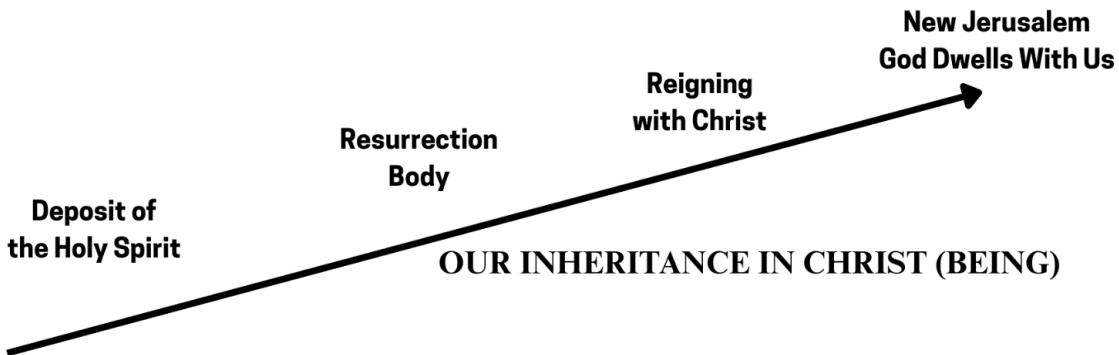
Billy Graham: "Heaven doesn't make this life less important; it makes it more important."

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.*

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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.*

The Disciple's Reward

In this study we will look at four important Bible passages that teach us how God rewards everyday Christian living that is led by faith and done out of obedience to the word of God. They are:

Matthew 6:1-6 “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. (2) “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. (3) 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. (5) “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. (6) But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Luke 6:31-36 And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. (32) “If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. (33) And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. (34) And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. (35) But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. (36) Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

Luke 14:12-14 He said also to the man who had invited him, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. (13) But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, (14) and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid (rewarded) at the resurrection of the just.”

Matthew 10:37-42 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (38) And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. (39) Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (40) “Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. (41) The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. (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.”

What are the first duties of every Christian disciple? To love God, and to love one's neighbour as oneself. This involves being unselfish, generous and kind. These passages tell us that heaven notices a difference between the selfish, cold and poorly-lived life and the loving, kind, generous well-lived life. Selfish people are roundly condemned in many parables such as the Rich Fool, Lazarus and the Rich Man, and the Sheep and the Goats (where they fail to help the hungry, naked and imprisoned). By contrast, the Good Samaritan is unselfish, kind, generous and is moved by compassion. Compassion is the most frequent emotion of Jesus and is mentioned 11 times in the Gospels. We are to walk as He

walked (1 John 2:6), sharing His priorities and choices. As new creations we are called to do the good deeds that God has foreordained for us to do (Ephesians 2:10) and it is as we perform these good deeds that we earn our reward, but not our salvation, which is a free gift (Ephesians 2:8,9).

Our First Passage. Matthew 6:1-6 above, tells us that our good deeds should not be publicized, rather they should be done in secret, not shared on YouTube! If we publicize our good deeds, for the purpose of gaining funds or the approval of others, then we lose our heavenly reward. When we are “seen by others” we receive our reward in this life and not in the Millennium. If you rescue a puppy or fix someone’s tire you don’t need to make a dramatic video about it! Be a disciple not a trumpet-blower! You should give in secret, you should pray in secret, you should fast without telling any but those who need to know, and your left hand should not know what your right hand is doing. Your good deeds are between you and the Lord!

If we seek publicity and approval then “*you will have no reward from your Father who is in Heaven*” (Matthew 6:1). If we preach or teach for human approval then God forgets about our sermon, it is not written down in His books for future reward. If I write these Bible studies to get applause, then God will not notice the effort that I have put into them. This is a hard and difficult truth because we naturally love getting attention and approval from others.

Our audience should be “an audience of One”, that is our only audience should be God. When God is our audience we can be a truth-teller like the apostle Paul!

Galatians 1:10 *For now do I persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I would not be a servant of Christ.*

Our Second Passage. Luke 6:31-36 is absolutely full of essential commands for the Christian disciple, the first of which is known as The Golden Rule: *And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.* And its parallel passage is found in Matthew 7:12: *“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.* These verses indicate that we should not be self-centered, that other people are genuinely equal to us, that we should serve them, and that we should be highly considerate of their needs. It helps us to get out of our heads when we ask “What would I want done to me, if I was in the other person’s situation”? If we would like others to pray for us, then we should also pray for them. If we enjoy being encouraged, then we should also encourage others. If being given gifts makes us happy, we should give to others also, remembering that it is better to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

Other religions have the Golden Rule in its negative form occasionally referred to as the Silver Rule: “Do not do unto others what you would not want done unto you”. The Silver Rule is passive, we are not required to do anything out of compassion, rather they are to merely avoid being nasty. It allows people to do nothing at all. Jesus teaches us this positive version, this proactive version, of actually doing to others the good things that we would like done to us.

Leadership coaches have invented the Platinum Rule: *The Platinum Rule is a principle that advocates treating others the way they want to be treated, rather than how one would want to be treated oneself. This concept is presented as a more empathetic and effective alternative to the Golden Rule, which suggests treating others as one would like to be treated. The Platinum Rule emphasizes understanding individual preferences, needs, and communication styles, recognizing that people have diverse ways of being supported and valued.*

God rewards us for being a decent, kind, thoughtful and considerate human being. The Lord treats us in the same manner as we treat others, such as:

Matthew 5:7 “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*

Matthew 6:14-15 *For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, (15) but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

If we treat others well, if we are kind to the poor and needy, if we lend to those who cannot pay us back, then God will treat us well in return! Which leads to the next batch of verses from Luke 6!
(33) And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. (34) And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. (35) But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.

Jesus is asking us to do good works that are contrary to self-centered fallen human nature. He is telling us that reciprocity gains no reward from the heavenly father, but rather we are love our enemies, and to do good and lend expecting nothing in return. These acts which go far beyond what common duty or ethical obligation requires are known in philosophy as “supererogatory acts” and here is the Wikipedia definition¹:

Supererogation ([Late Latin](#): *supererogatio* "payment beyond what is needed or asked", from *super* "beyond" and *erogare* "to pay out, expend", itself from *ex* "out" and *rogare* "to ask") is the performance of more than is asked for; the action of doing more than [duty](#) requires.^[1] In [ethics](#), an act is **supererogatory** if it is good but not morally required to be done. It refers to an act that is more than is necessary, when another course of action—Involving less—would still be an acceptable action. It differs from a duty, which is an act wrong not to do, and from acts morally neutral. Supererogation may be considered as performing above and beyond a normative course of duty to further benefits and functionality.

[This is different from the Roman Catholic doctrine of supererogatory works, where saints, who have done more than necessary for salvation, can use their heavenly rewards to perform miracles for those who pray to them, this is definitely NOT biblical, and we should not pray to saints or to anyone, or anything, other than God.]

It is not strictly ethically necessary to turn the other cheek, to pray for those who persecute you, to love your enemies or to lend to others without expecting any return. There is no law on earth that can compel you to lend you hard-earned cash to someone whom you know will never pay you back. However, God, as usual has other ideas:

Proverbs 19:17 *Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.*

When we lend money to someone who cannot pay it back, we are actually lending to God, and He will

¹¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supererogation>

repay us with a reward. Such actions make us “sons of the Most High” (Luke 6:35), that is, when done on a consistent basis they indicate that we have a new nature, not a fallen grasping nature. We become “sons” of God by sharing in His divine nature and our God is kind to the ungrateful and evil.

This leads us to the last exhortation in our Luke 6 passage: *Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.* The reason for being merciful is because our Father is merciful. We are to be imitators of God (Ephesians 5:1). The disciples reward comes about when he or she shares in the nature of God by displaying mercy towards others. The mercy in us is a divine thing, a heavenly thing. This requirement for a merciful heart is set forth in the stark contrasts of the parable of the Sheep and the Goats:

Matthew 25:34-40 *Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. (35) For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, (36) I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ (37) Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? (38) And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? (39) And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ (40) And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’*

This passage tells us that being merciful to others is counted as being merciful to God Himself! Such mercy also displays that we have a changed heart, and are a new creation, and are fit to enter into the heavenly realms, possess eternal life and inherit the Kingdom prepared for us from before the foundation of the world! What a mighty reward! (On the other hand, the cold-hearted, selfish “goats” in Matthew 25 are rejected by the King and suffer eternal punishment).

Why should we bother? That is the main question that the hard-hearted throw toward the merciful. The merciful are regarded as fools in this world. The merciful are viewed as just wasting their time and their money. The hard-hearted will say “If I am going to give my money away, it will only be to members of my own family!”. There are many who speak against any act of charity as “just creating dependence” and who scoff at foreign aid and assistance programs. While such Programs may need careful accounting, we are to be glad and generous givers “for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Our Third Passage is from Luke 14:12-14 and it tells us to invite those on the margins of society (the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind) into our social circle, and to be a blessing to those who can never repay us. It also tells us the timing of our rewards: “at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 12:14). I know of several churches that have taken this passage literally and who have real feasts for “those whom most consider least,” and these feasts are a deep spiritual ministry to people who have never been seen or acknowledged.

Ministering to those whom most consider least does not just change them, it also changes us and turns our social priorities right way up! The rather elite Roman church that included members from Caesar’s palace and the city treasurer was exhorted by Paul the apostle to rearrange things:

Romans 12:16 *Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.*

In James 2:1-11 there is an extensive prophetic rebuke about treating rich Christians with honor while treating poor Christians with dishonor, the core of which is:

James 2:3-4 *and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” (4) have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*

God wants to change our hearts by getting us to love, acknowledge, serve and socialize with the marginalized. We bless them, and they change us, and God rejoices when we step out of our comfort zone to accomplish this!

God treats us in the same manner as we treat others and honors us when we honor others, particularly when we honor the poor and welcome in those whom most consider least. Who are the untouchables in your social group? In my city in Australia in the 1980's it was Aboriginals, HIV patients and the mentally ill. A friend of mine, Dave Andrews and his wife Angie went and lived among them so as to carry out these specific verses in Luke. Dave and Angie built a Christian community among them that is still going strong today! Another friend of mine, Viv Grigg, went and lived in the urban slums in Manila and wrote the book *Companion to the Poor*. These people have given their lives to serve those whom most consider least and they will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.

Our Final Passage in this section is Matthew 10:37-42 and it is about the Disciple's Cross which is price of self-sacrifice as we follow Christ and enter into the Kingdom of God. It begins with some very stern demands: *Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (38) And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.*

Jesus is demanding that we totally rearrange our natural priorities and instead adopt spiritual priorities. The cross is where we die to the natural life and come into the spiritual life. Our natural life is gone to the extent that Paul could say "I no longer live":

Galatians 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Galatians 5:24 *And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

Galatians 6:14-15 *But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (15) For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.*

This complete break with our natural priorities, our natural life goals, our natural and socially accepted way of being, is so severe that, in some cases, especially persecution, we are not allowed to cling to family members such as our parents, or even our children. This leads naturally to the next verse:

(39) *Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.* Here are some parallel passages:

Matthew 16:24-27 *Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. (25) For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (26) For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? (27) For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.*

John 12:25-26 *Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. (26) If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.*

In these passages the heavenly reward is somehow connected to “losing” one’s life in this world. What does that mean? Losing one’s “life” is the act of renunciation. The act of saying “No” to corrupting temptations such as greed, personal ambition, pride, selfishness, immorality and emotional cruelty. It is saying “No” to the job that requires you to tell lies, keep a second set of books, or be dishonest with customers. It is walking out the door when people force you to disown your faith in Jesus Christ.

This renunciation used to be part of the common baptismal formula: “Do you renounce the Devil and all of his works?” (Why evangelical churches leave this out is beyond me) and thus the new convert is told that becoming a Christian is a complete break with everything that is evil.

Once we decide to make a complete break with evil, and particularly with evil that feels good, it is then that we start to find our new life in Christ. When the addict is addicted, he or she is losing all things (health, family etc.) for one thing (the addiction), however when the addict finds Christ and is saved and gives up their addiction they lose one thing(the addiction) to gain all things, which are their salvation, their health, their family back and so on. Unfortunately, we are naturally addicted to sin, and it is only once we renounce sin through repentance, and put our faith in Jesus Christ that we can find new and eternal life!

Once we take up our Cross and die to self and to sin, and lose our life in this world, then we move into the place where the Father will reward us and honor us (Matthew 16:27, John 12:26 above). This will occur when the Son of Man comes in glory with his angels. That is, at the return of Jesus Christ.

At that point those who honor the righteous will be honored: *(41) The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. (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.”*

These verses probably mainly apply to the time of the Great Tribulation when just giving a cup of water to a Christian disciple, who will not be allowed to buy or sell (Revelation 13:17), will be a radical act. These heroic helpers will by no means lose their reward. In the calculus of God, those who receive Christ’s messengers, are viewed as receiving Christ Himself, and those who receive Christ are viewed as actually receiving the Father. Thus, as Christian disciples, we can earn heavenly rewards as we go through our daily lives by doing our good deeds in all humility, by loving our enemies, being kind and merciful to all, by taking up our cross, and by being hospitable to the very servants of the Lord.

The Servant's Reward

Clergy and Laity

Before we study the Servant's Reward we need to deal with the very touchy question of the clergy/laity divide; which has two extremes:

1. The clergy and the laity are very different at the level of salvation, one saves the other. In this false view, God is represented by the clergy who are mediators with God for the saints, and you need to confess your sins to the clergy, who are priests standing between you and God. However, this is false because there is only one Mediator between God and Man, Christ Jesus:

1 Timothy 2:5-6 *For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, (6) who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.*

The book of Hebrews makes it abundantly clear that there are no priests standing between Christians and God. Every Christian can pray directly to Jesus Christ (Hebrews 4:14-16).

2. The clergy and the laity have no spiritual difference whatsoever. In this false view, full-time clergy have zero spiritual authority, are not special in any way and that Christians can just take it upon themselves be a pastor or a Bible teacher. However, it is clear that the Holy Spirit appoints some people to offices such as apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor-teacher (Ephesians 4:11,12) and makes them overseers over the “flock”. Being an overseer is regarded as “an office” requiring certain qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

Acts 20:28 *Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.* (see also 1 Peter 5:1-4, 1 Timothy 5:17, Hebrews 13:17))

So, there are “overseers” who have charge over “the flock”, and who will have to give an account for their leadership (Hebrews 13:17). These overseers however are to be servant leaders and not domineering (1 Peter 5:1-4). Teaching elders are worthy of double honor (1 Timothy 5:17) but also get double the judgement (James 3:1)!

Also, some of God’s servants are clearly different in that they are set apart, by God, in a special way for the work of the gospel. Paul had a strong sense of being called and appointed:

Romans 1:1 *Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,*

2 Timothy 1:11-12 *for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do...*

And in Acts we find that Paul was God’s “chosen instrument”:

Acts 9:15 *But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.*

Therefore, there is quite a large difference between the clergy and the laity, however it is not a difference in some fundamental spiritual nature, but a difference in God’s appointing and calling. The overseers, elders, deacons, pastors, teachers, evangelists, prophets and apostles are primarily foot-washing servant leaders (Matthew 20:25-28, Luke 22:24-30, John 13:1-17) who are not to lord it over the flock (1 Peter 5:3) but to serve the saints in spiritual matters and are to be honored by them in material matters (1 Corinthians 9:11).

The Master's Will

A servant is only rewarded if he or she carries out the Master's will. God assigns our gifts and our calling. If the master says, go and cook dinner, and the servant decides to chop firewood instead, the servant is not rewarded. Chopping firewood can be exhausting hard work, however it is the wrong kind of hard work at that time! A noted Pentecostal evangelist in the 1950's decided to give up evangelism, which was not paying very well, and became a Bible teacher in 1960 and ended up teaching false doctrine, many attempted to correct him, but he refused correction, as a result he died early, in a car accident in 1965. Jonah and Moses both tried to avoid the calling of the Lord to their respective specific tasks, while Mary, the mother of Jesus gave the correct response:

Luke 1:38 *And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”*

If God has called you to a specific ministry task, then you must do that exact thing, and not run away from it, and you must not choose to do something else instead that you perhaps feel better suited for.

The first level of the Master's Will is the generally revealed will of God. All of God's servants must be merciful, righteous, honest, kind, loving and faithful. We should not be boastful or immoral or a lover of money. There are many exhortations in 1 Corinthians, and in the pastoral epistles (1&2 Timothy & Titus) that tell the Lord's servants how to live in the general will of God and here is just one of them:

1 Timothy 4:11-16 *Command and teach these things. (12) Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. (13) Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. (14) Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. (15) Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. (16) Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.*

Apparently, there are some servants that refused to carry out the Father's will:

Matthew 21:28-32 *“What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ (29) And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went. (30) And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go. (31) Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. (32) For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.*

The second level of the Master's Will is the faithful calling, a specific assigned task, that we are to do. The parables of the ten talents (Matthew 25:14-30) and the five minas (Luke 19:13-27) make it clear that there are good servants and wicked servants and the good servants eagerly carry out the will of God that has been assigned to them to do, while the wicked servants refuse to do so. Jesus, in Matthew 24, makes the point with great force:

Matthew 24:45-51 *“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? (46) Blessed is that servant whom his master*

will find so doing when he comes. (47) Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. (48) But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' (49) and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, (50) the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know (51) and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Rewarded at The Last Judgement:

Revelation 11:18 *The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth."*

All of the servant parables deal with rendering an account when the Master returns. In Matthew 19:27-30 the apostles will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel, during the Millennium. In the verse in Revelation quoted above it is at the end of the age, that "the time has come" for rewarding the saints and servants of God. We are not to expect vast material rewards in this life. Many great servants of God have lived very humble lives.

Servant Leadership

Luke 22:24-30 *A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. (25) And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. (26) But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. (27) For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves. (28) "You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, (29) and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, (30) that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

God's servants are not to "beat the sheep", to be domineering or to lord it over them (1 Peter 5:1-4). The leader is to be "as one who serves" and not to be a special kind of elitist. The elitism of some clergy and the spiritual abuse they have heaped on their flocks has led to widespread rebellion and total disrespect of them in many quarters. In John 13, Jesus washes the feet of the disciples and then instructs them to have that same attitude toward one another.

Faithful Service Even in Small Things:

Luke 19:12-26 *"A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. (13) And having called ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business till I come.' ... (16) Then came the first, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned ten minas.' (17) And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.' (18) And the second came, saying, 'Master, your mina made five minas.' (19) Likewise, he said to him, 'You also be over five cities.' (20) Then another came, saying, 'Master, behold your mina, which I had laid away in a handkerchief.... (24) And he said to those standing by, 'Take the mina away from him, and give it to him who has ten minas.' (25) "But they said to him, 'Master, he has ten minas.' (26) For I say to you that to everyone who has, more shall be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him..." (see also the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:15-30)*

The nobleman rewards his good servants on the basis of faithfulness in small things: '*Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.*' The nobleman rewards tested character. The assigned task was a test not just of competence, but of character. Jesus makes this clear in **Luke 16:10** "*One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.*" Psychologists talk about the shopping cart theory. The person who always returns the shopping cart has a better character than the person who just leaves it abandoned in the parking area. The little things say a lot about who we really are! God observes us closely as do His heavenly Watchers (Daniel 4:17) and even the hairs on our head are numbered (Matthew 10:30) and our acts of loyalty to God are written down in His books (Malachi 3:16). Mordecai was faithful in reporting an assassination plot, and later was greatly rewarded by the King (Esther chapter 6)! A pastor who is faithful in shepherding a rural congregation of 15 people can still receive a great reward on the day of judgment because he will be found "faithful in very little".

Enduring Quality:

1 Corinthians 3:5-15 *Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord has given to each one? (6) I planted, Apollos watered, but God gives the increase. (7) So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. (8) Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. (9) For we are coworkers with God; you are God's field, you are God's building. (10) According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise architect I have laid the foundation, but another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. (11) For no other foundation can anyone lay, other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (12) Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, (13) each one's work shall be made manifest; for the Day shall reveal it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall test each one's work, as to what sort it is. (14) If anyone's work which he has built remains, he shall receive a reward. (15) If anyone's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, but so as through fire.*

Quality is more important than quantity. A haystack is large but does not survive the fire of testing, a diamond ring is small but will pass the test. God wants us to build with gold, silver and precious stones! He does not want us to build with wood, hay or stubble. The quality of our service matters. How well did we love people? Were we holy in our speech, life and conduct? How deeply did we pray? How solid and true was our doctrine? Did we build on the foundation that is Christ alone or upon human philosophy, or on myths and legends invented by men and women? Did we seek human approval or did we seek God's approval (Galatians 1:10, 1 Thessalonians 2:4)? We need to deliberately aim at quality, quality is not an accident. "*Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction and skillful execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives.*" – William Foster This may include deep study; I was greatly blessed in my ministry because I was able to obtain a good theological education from a sound biblical seminary. Quality involves self-discipline, tough choices and a determination to pursue excellence in ministry!

The Crown of Glory :

1 Peter 5:1-4 *The elders who are among you I exhort, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed; (2) shepherd the flock of God among you, overseeing not by compulsion, but rather willingly, not in fondness for dishonest gain, but rather eagerly; (3) nor as being masters over the flock under you, but rather being examples to the flock. (4) And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*

The apostle Peter instructs his fellow elders to have good ethics (not for dishonest gain, not being overbearing, not as an onerous duty) and to lead by example, rather than by force. A good elder, who follows these rules, will receive the unfading crown of glory. Notice the humility of the apostle. He does not call himself the Chief Shepherd even though Christ had made him the leader of the church! Peter just saw himself as a “fellow elder”, the Chief Shepherd was Christ alone. Again, the reward is given at the appearing of the Lord.

Sacrificial Service:

1 Corinthians 9:14-18 *In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. (15) But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting. (16) For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! (17) For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. (18) What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.*

Paul was entitled to get his living from the gospel, however he chose to be a bivocational (“working pastor”) so that he could present the gospel free of charge to the Gentiles. As a result, Paul would get a reward in Heaven for what he gave up for the sake of the gospel. Many clergy these days are bivocational because of various factors causing a decline in support, some, for instance, do supply teaching in local schools. Those who make significant financial sacrifices for the sake of the gospel will gain a reward from Christ on that Day.

Most missionaries do not charge their hearers or expect tithes or offerings from the churches that they establish. Occasionally this causes problems when they turn the church over to a national pastor, who does need to be paid from local tithes and offerings. The missionary should spend time training the church in how to financially support their pastor before the missionary moves on. Pastors are generally paid by the local congregation; however Bible teachers, missionaries and evangelists may rely on supporters or on their own business efforts (such as selling books).

Does a well-paid pastor receive no reward? That would be reading way too much into this text! They will certainly receive the reward of being a faithful shepherd of the flock, the crown of glory above. However, those who suffer for the sake of the gospel get an extra reward of some kind.

Conclusion

The servants of God (elders, overseers, pastors, teachers, evangelists, prophets, apostles etc.) are set apart by God for the work of the ministry and are rewarded for faithfully doing the Master’s Will, even in small things, and doing so with works that have integrity and very high quality, and for their sacrificial service to God, for which they will receive the crown of glory on the Day of Judgment. They must not be domineering but must be servant leaders, taking care of the flock and living consistent Christian lifestyles that are a good example to all of those they care for.

The Overcomer's Reward

The Greek word for “overcome” is nikao (νικάω) which means to win, to defeat, to conquer in an utterly complete and comprehensive way. The Nike brand is based on this word group and stands for victory in sport. “Nikao” is used of temporary victories such as those of the Antichrist over the saints (Revelation 11:7, 13:7) which results in the martyrdom of God’s Church during the Tribulation. However, it is mainly used for the Christian’s victory over demonic powers and principalities and powers because of the Cross of Christ and the faith and endurance of the believers. It is especially used in the context of victory over accusation in court and is even used once (Romans 3:4) of God’s victory over those who are accusing Him of injustice. We are also to overcome evil with good (Romans 12:20,21). We are rewarded for winning the battle, however it is only because of the work of Christ that we win!

In some of the New Testament verses we find that the past tense is used as in “you have overcome” and in others the victory is a future event “to him who overcomes”. We have overcome the world and all of its delusions by seeing through it all and having faith in Christ Jesus. We have yet to overcome as we battle temptations, persecutions and false doctrine all around us every day.

Overcoming the Strong Man

Luke 11:17-23 *But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. (18) And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. (19) And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. (20) But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. (21) When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; (22) but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil. (23) Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.*

1 John 2:12-14 *I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. (13) I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father. (14) I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.*

We are in the midst of an ongoing spiritual battle in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:10-18) and we are either on one side of the battle or the other (Luke 11:23 above). Jesus entered into this battle by casting out demons. His opponents said that He was using demonic power to do so. Jesus answers them with the “house divided” statements (Luke 11:17-20). At the Cross He takes away Satan’s armor (Luke 11:22) and triumphs over the principalities and powers (Colossians 2:13-15).

In the 1 John passage above, the “young men” are believers who are strong, have the word of God abiding in them, and have overcome the evil one. They are victors in their spiritual battles because they are spiritually strong, rather than spiritually weak, and this has come about because of their deep knowledge and personal application of the Word of God to their lives (which is the sword of the Spirit, Ephesians 6:17, Hebrews 4:12). The apostle could say of them that “the word of God abides in you”!

Overcoming the World

John 16:32-33 *Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. (33) I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”*

John 17:14 *I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.*

1 John 5:4-5 *For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. (5) Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*

The “world” (kosmos), in these passages, is the deceptive, evil, cosmological, demonic thought-controlling powers and principalities that keep unsaved people in a state of disobedience (Ephesians 2:1-3) and spiritual and mental hostility to God (Romans 8:7, Colossians 1:21). The world is so opposed to God that friendship with the world is spiritual treason and makes one an enemy of God (James 4:4). We are never to love the world or the things of the world, if we do, then the love of the Father is not in us (1 John 2:15-17).

If we are born of God, we overcome the world by believing that Jesus is the Son of God. First, Christ has overcome the world (John 16:33) and His apostles were “not of this world” (John 17:14) because they had received God’s word, which is why the world hated them. Those who are born of God are living in absolute defiance of the powers and principalities of this dark age (Ephesians 6:12), and they are no longer sons of disobedience (Ephesians 2:1-3) but rather are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms as conquerors and victors, as those saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:4-9). In an interesting side-note, Noah “condemned the world” by having active, saving faith in an age of wickedness and unbelief: **Hebrews 11:7** *By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.*

Overcoming Spiritual Deception

1 John 4:1-6 *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. (2) By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, (3) and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. (4) Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. (5) They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. (6) We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.*

He who is in us (Christ Jesus) is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4) and will give us the victory over the antichrist spirits that seek to deceive the saints (1 John 4:1,3; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12). We must test the spirits in order to discern which is the spirit truth and the spirit of error (1 John 4:6) and among those critical tests is to test whether they believe that Jesus Christ has actually come in the flesh (1 John 4:2) and whether they truly listen to apostolic teaching (1 John 4:6). We overcome these

antichrists because Christ is in us and the Holy Spirit instructs us in all truth (1 John 2:20,27).

Overcoming Sin and End Times Persecution

In the following passages in the book of Revelation overcoming involves “doing something” to repair a breach in the faith of the church, or to maintain the faith of the saints in the church. Here the overcoming is active. It is the specific action required to win their individual spiritual conflicts.

This includes repenting of some sin (2:5, 16; 3:3,19), doing the holy and worthy works they did at first (2:5,26; 3:2), enduring persecution (2:10), discipling a false prophet (2:20-24), holding fast to what they have (2:25, 3:11), waking up (3;2,3), and even forsaking a wealthy, closed and arrogant mindset (3:17-20).

Here things are conditional rather than unconditional. If you overcome, then you will be rewarded.

However, if you fail to repent, if you do not overcome, then you will be disciplined, for example:

Revelation 2:5 *Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.*

This is a distinct contrast to the notion that overcoming is identical to salvation; that all we have to do is believe in Jesus and we have automatically overcome, both now and forever.

Revelation tells us that we are part of a raging cosmic battle, that the Devil wants to tempt, deceive, accuse, kill and destroy the saints and that we must contend for our souls against all kinds of spiritual enemies.

We overcome by winning this cosmic battle and we then receive rewards that are more than houses and lands in the Millennium. The overcomer’s rewards go to the core of our spiritual life (2:7,11; 3:5), our spiritual identity (2:17, 3:11,12) and our spiritual authority (2:26-28, 3:21).

Revelation 2:7 *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of My God." '*

This is more than just possessing eternal life, it is fully participating in intimate communion with God and in the heavenly city. The leaves of the tree of life were for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:2) and it also bore twelve kinds of fruit and one kind of fruit was always in season. Participation in the tree of life was a very great spiritual privilege that was only available to those who had washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb (22:14). It is a full restoration of the human spiritual potential that was lost at the Fall (Genesis 2:9, 3:22-24).

Revelation 2:11 *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall in no way be harmed by the second death." '*

This is an assurance of the eternal, uninterrupted, continuation of the spiritual life of the faithful. The second death is the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14, 21:8) prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). Those who reign with Christ after the first resurrection are not affected by the second death (Revelation 20:6). Their spiritual life is unceasing and uninterrupted. Those who are utterly selfish (Matthew 25:41), who take the mark of the beast (Revelation 14:10), whose name is not in the book of life (Revelation 20:15), and those with evil characters are thrown into the lake of fire

(Revelation 21:8). When we overcome sin and temptation (Matthew 18:7-9) through self-discipline and faith we become part of those who will reign with Christ during the Millennium.

Revelation 2:17 *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to him some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except he who receives it."*

The hidden manna is secret spiritual sustenance. The word "secret" comes from the Greek word *kyrpto* from which we get cryptography. It is the encoded, deeper truth of God. The white stone was used for acquittal in ancient courts, a black stone was used for "guilty" verdicts. It symbolizes divine pardon and acceptance. The new name is in the perfect tense and indicates that it has been written down, once and forever and cannot be altered. No one knows this name except the recipient. This prevents them from being cursed by black magic. It is victory over the occult. The overcomer cannot be cursed because a) they are without fault b) their name is secret c) they know the deep things of God and have the real hidden knowledge not the dark knowledge, and their knowledge is from a higher realm and can defeat the magicians of the age and the Gnostics of the first century.

Revelation 2:26-28 *And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations-- (27) 'And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be smashed to pieces like clay vessels'-- (28) as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star.*

The morning star is Christ in His cosmic powers and divine eternal authority (Revelation 22:16). The overcomer participates in Christ's Sonship rule because the believer is a brother/sister (Hebrews 2:11). The overcomer is given absolute (iron rod) authority over the rebellious nations of the world so that they are conquered, even shattered like pottery; so that the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of God and of His Christ (Revelation 11:15). This authority is given to those who are faithfully obedient through intense suffering "*he who keeps My works until the end*" which agrees with **Romans 8:17** *and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.* The overcomer enters into the eternal, cosmic rulership of Christ over all rebellious forces.

Revelation 3:5 *He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and by no means shall I erase his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.*

This is the church of Sardis, that looks alive, but is spiritually dead, and is involved in impurity. It needs to repent, wake up and walk in holiness. The implication is that, at the time of writing, they are an utter disgrace. This promise is a promise of removal of disgrace in return for contrite repentance. They will walk in white garments. Their name will not be erased from the book of life; and Christ will be proud of them and confess their name before the Father and His angels. Their impurity and shame will have become purity and honor! The disgraced church will have become the restored church. Repentance erases the shame of the past and brings in new possibilities. The game is not over!

Revelation 3:10-12 *Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. (11) I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. (12) The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.*

This is the faithful church of Philadelphia, which kept Christ's word of patient endurance even after persecution by a Jewish synagogue in that city. The city was prone to earthquakes so these promises are all about stability, permanence and protection. Keep you "from" the hour of trial can also be rendered "keep you through". The endurance is Christ's own endurance resident in the believers through the power of the Holy Spirit (v.10). They are to maintain their good testimony without become sluggish, so as not to lose their crown. The pillar is a permanent, immovable, stable honorable place in God's holy temple. They will never be removed from the presence of God. They will be completely identified with God; His name will be inscribed on them. They will be spiritually prominent. God will "own" them rather than disown them. They will fully participate in the heavenly realms and the New Jerusalem.

Revelation 3:21 *He that overcomes, I will grant to him to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.*

The lukewarm church of Laodicea was about to be spat out of God's mouth. They urgently needed "eye salve" to give them some awareness of sin and a longing for spiritual purity. The message was "*be zealous therefore and repent*" (3:19). It seems to have been a wealthy church full of self-important Christians, so God appeals to their self-importance by promising them throne-room authority!

Christ has been given all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18) and is seated at the right-hand of the Father, far above all principalities and powers (Ephesians 1:20-23, 1 Peter 3:22)) and we are seated with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6,7). The repentant, faithful, pure Christian who overcomes worldliness and worldly ways will have great spiritual authority that vastly exceeds anything they could get here on earth by mere human ambition.

Overcoming Satan

Revelation 12:10-11 *Then I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ, because the accuser of our brothers, the one who accused them before our God day and night, has been thrown out of heaven. (11) And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.*

Revelation 17:12-14 *These (ten earthly kings and the Beast) will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, and elect, and faithful."*

The saints overcome the Devil by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony. They are called, elect and faithful. They actively participate in the victory of the Lamb, as part of His triumphant spiritual army, and Satan is cast down. Not just Satan, but all the kingdoms of this world and the Beast, are also defeated by God's Church!

The Church Victorious is triumphant over sin, death, Hell, and the powers and principalities of this age. The saints win because they apply the blood of the Lamb to the problems of the world. Through faith, obedience and endurance Satan is crushed under their feet (Romans 16:20).

The overcomers are martyrs "and they did not love their lives to the death" (Revelation 12:11). Spiritual victory arises out of earthly defeat. The overcomers keep the glorious end in mind!

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 *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.*

Romans 8:18 *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*

Romans 8:37-39 *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (38) For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, (39) nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

The Final Victory

Revelation 21:1-7 *And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. And there was no more sea. (2) Then I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having been prepared like a bride having been adorned for her husband. (3) And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them. ... (6) And He said to me, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give from the spring of the water of life freely to him that is thirsty. (7) **He that overcomes I shall give to him these things, and I shall be God to him, and he shall be to Me a son.***

In the final victory we will inherit all things, even the new heaven and the new earth with great glory; and we will have an established and permanent divine relationship, where He is God to us and we shall be His sons and daughters. The cosmic consequences of the Cross are now fully manifest and God has finally brought many sons to glory:

Hebrews 2:10-11 *For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory.....That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers,*

Romans 8:29-30 *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (30) And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

The Cross does not just get sinners saved, it also justifies, sanctifies and glorifies them, and makes them overcomers. Christ's work on the Cross gives us an eternal spiritual destiny with great glory, for all the ages to come, in a new heaven and a new earth. God's plan to grant us awesome and eternal heavenly rewards is finally complete! We were saved in order to be sanctified, glorified and rewarded!

Inheritance – The Resurrection Body

Flesh and blood does not inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 15:50). Only the immortal spiritual resurrected body, made in the image of the Heavenly Man (Jesus) can operate in the Kingdom of God. Therefore, the first part of our inheritance is the body that will be ours for all eternity! The apostle Paul answers some basic questions about this glorious resurrection body in his first epistle to the church in Corinth:

1 Corinthians 15:35-58 *But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” (36) You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. (37) And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. (38) But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. (39) For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. (40) There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. (41) There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. (42) So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. (43) It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. (44) It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. (45) Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. (46) But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. (47) The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. (48) As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. (49) Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. (50) I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. (51) Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, (52) in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. (53) For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. (54) When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” (55) “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” (56) The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. (57) But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (58) Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

This Passage Tells Us That:

1. The resurrection body is immortal and imperishable (v.42,53)
2. It is a powerful and glorious spiritual body (v. 43,44)
3. In the image of the Heavenly Man, Jesus Christ (v.47,49)
4. This mortal body is not the body “that is to be” (v. 37) but rather is sown like a seed, and the resurrection body is the resulting organism which will be different from the “seed” (v. 35-42).
5. The resurrection body is given by God, as He wills. (v. 38)
6. We shall all be changed (v. 52) and our powerful spiritual bodies will differ from each other just as stars differ from each other in glory. (v. 40-42)
7. This change will occur rapidly, even instantly, at the Last Trumpet (v. 52)
8. Our present natural physical body cannot inherit the Kingdom of God (v.50) because it is

- perishable, weak and dishonorable (v. 42,43) and is of dust (v.47,48) and mortal (v.53)
9. We must first die in order that we might come to life in the resurrection (v. 35-38)
 10. However, the resurrection will give us total victory over sin, death and the law (v. 53-57)
 11. The resurrection makes us members of a new humanity and a new spiritual lineage that is not ‘from Adam’ but which is from Christ. (v. 20-23, 44-49).
 12. The resurrection hope means that our labor in the Lord is not in vain! (v.58)

Other Findings

13. We will be like the angels in Heaven and will not marry or be given in marriage (Matthew 22:30) but will be sons of God (Luke 20:36)
14. Our rewards will be given out at the resurrection of the just (Luke 14:14)
15. There is a resurrection of life and a resurrection of judgment (John 5:29, Acts 24:15)
16. Jesus is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25)
17. If we believe in Jesus, we will experience His resurrection power and we will not die but live (John 11:23-27)
18. We are united with Christ’s resurrection through baptism (genuine conversion) which raises us up spiritually (Colossians 2:12).
19. Baptism also indicates that we have died to sin and now live to God and therefore we will experience a resurrection like His (Romans 6:1-11)
20. We have already been mystically raised up with Christ and we are seated with Him at the right hand of God (Ephesians 1:20,2:6, Colossians 3:1)
21. As a result of being mystically raised with Christ we are to seek the things that are above (Colossians 3:1)
22. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was the “first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20-23) and we are the latter fruits who will receive the physical change later on as a promise from God.
23. Just as in Adam all die, so also all those who are in Christ shall be made alive (1 Corinthians 15:22) so there is not an elite group of Christians who get resurrected rather “all who are in Christ” will experience the resurrection.
24. We will be raised from the dead by the power of God (1 Corinthians 6:14)
25. Believers are raised together, at once, at the Last Trumpet, the dead in Christ shall rise first, then those who are alive and remain will meet Christ in the air. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)
26. All the saints (believing Christians) will be raised together and stand before the Presence of God (2 Corinthians 4:14)
27. Our resurrection inheritance is connected to the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and is kept in heaven for us and is imperishable, undefiled and unfading (1 Peter 1:3-5).
28. The first resurrection is prior to the thousand-year reign of Christ and those who participate in this resurrection will be spared from the second death and will reign and rule with Christ during the Millennium (Revelation 20:4-6).

The Combined Picture

Christ died and rose again as the first fruits from the dead, and when we believe in Jesus we all become mystical participants in the new humanity, which is a spiritual humanity. This new humanity will be like the angels in heaven and are sons and daughters of the living God who will be fully revealed when Christ returns (Romans 8:19).

We are spiritually united with Christ through baptism, which symbolizes our death and resurrection with Christ Jesus. We are now seated with Christ in the heavenly realms. We have died to sin, death and the Jewish law. As a result, we are to seek the things that are above and not the things that are

below. All those who are in Christ shall be made alive on the last day because Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life.

At present we have been mystically raised with Christ but then we will be physically raised from the dead to a new spiritual body that is like that of the angels and is powerful, immortal, imperishable, undefiled and glorious. The resurrection body will be in the image of Jesus Christ, the Man from Heaven. All Christians will be resurrected together, and those who are alive will by no means precede those who have fallen asleep.

The resurrection body will be part of our inheritance, and will differ among Christians as star differs from star in glory. The resurrection body is given by God, not created by man. It will enable us to participate fully in the eternal Kingdom of God, because normal flesh and blood cannot enter the eternal state. Once we receive our new resurrection bodies we will reign and rule with Christ for one thousand years during the Millennium. Our resurrection rewards mean that our labor for the Lord is not in vain!

Reincarnation

The Bible does not ever teach reincarnation. It teaches resurrection instead. Hebrews tells us that only die once, and then the judgement!

Hebrews 9:27-28 *And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, (28) so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.*

Some claim that John the Baptist was the reincarnation of the prophet Elijah. John the Baptist came “in the spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:17) however this was a mystical reference not a reference to the physical and historical Elijah. John was not Elijah reincarnated. When Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration He met Moses and Elijah (Matthew 17:3), not Moses and John the Baptist. John the Baptist was “Elijah who is to come” in a mystical and prophetic sense (Matthew 11:14, 17:11,12) and not in a literal sense.

The saints who have passed away have gone directly into the presence of Christ (Philippians 1:23) and they have stayed there as souls before God (Revelation 6:9).

Revelation 6:9-11 *When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. (10) They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” (11) Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.*

The martyrs under the altar are still in Heaven, they have not left Heaven in order to come back as fish, goats or even as other people. When Christ returns many of His holy ones return with Him at the Last Trumpet (1 Thessalonians 3:13, Jude 1:14,15). Then their bodies will rise from the dead and they will be “fully clothed” (2 Corinthians 5:4). It is clear that the martyrs are conscious souls and can communicate with Christ and even ask Him questions. This passage also disproves the idea of “soul sleep” where we are completely unconscious until the Resurrection. Jesus tells us that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are still alive with God in Heaven. They have obviously not been reincarnated.

Matthew 22:29-33 But Jesus answered them, “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. (30) For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. (31) And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: (32) ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?’ He is not God of the dead, but of the living.” (33) And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.

When Jesus said this, He was clearly indicating the Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had eternal souls that were still with God in Heaven. God could call Himself the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob because they were still alive. Thus, Jesus proved the eternal existence of souls. They were not changed into other souls or bodies, they were still the same people, however their location was now in Heaven.

The examples of John the Baptist, the martyrs under the altar, and of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, completely disprove the idea of reincarnation as a biblical teaching.

The Christian's Hope

The resurrection is the Christian's hope (Acts 23:6, 24:15, 1 Peter 1:3). If there is no resurrection, then there is no hope and we “are of all men most to be pitied”!

1 Corinthians 15:16-20 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. (17) And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. (18) Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. (19) If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. (20) But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Our hope is not in this life only. Our hope is in God's love after this earthly life is over. Our hope is in the resurrection, our reward, our rule and reigning with Christ, and in the glory of the New Jerusalem that comes down out of Heaven. We have a living and eternal hope. We can endure various trials. Though we have not seen Him, we love Him:

1 Peter 1:3-9 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (4) to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, (5) who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (6) In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, (7) so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (8) Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, (9) obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Our faith is not to be in immediate joys and comforts of this life but in an eternal inheritance, that we have gained through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!

Inheritance – The Kingdom of God

Daniel 7:13-14, 27 “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. (14) And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.... And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.’

- The Kingdom of God / Kingdom of Heaven is where God rules over angels, spiritual beings and human hearts in perfect love and obedience. The Kingdom of God is ancient and is much larger than the Church, and contains angels, archangels, and living creatures (Hebrews 12:22-24, Revelation chapters 4&5) as well as people. The Church is just part of the Kingdom of God.
- It is a spiritual and heavenly Kingdom and the center of the Kingdom is the heavenly throne. Jesus Christ sits at the right hand of the Father in the midst of the throne. (Revelation 4 & 5)
- It is a permanent and abiding Kingdom that cannot be shaken (Hebrews 12:28,29)
- The Kingdom is present through the Holy Spirit wherever two or three are gathered in the Name of Jesus. (Matthew 18:20)
- The Kingdom is only entered through the Narrow Gate (Matthew 7:13) and the Door (John 10:9) which is Christ Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life (John14:6)
- The Kingdom does not come by observation (Luke 17:20,21) and has no physical location on earth and it is not a church, a nation, a city, a place, or a political party.
- Apostate, unbelieving churches and false Christians are not really part of the Kingdom of God and will be removed from it on Judgment Day (Matthew 13: 37-43,47-50).

Matthew 25:34-36 *Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. (35) For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, (36) I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.*

The Kingdom of God is ancient, it has been in preparation for us from before the foundation of the world, it exists presently and is an everlasting Kingdom that given as an inheritance to the saints of the Most High. It is given to those who love their neighbor as themselves thus fulfilling the commands of Jesus Christ who is the King of this kingdom.

Luke 12:31-34 *Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. (32) “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. (33) Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. (34) For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

God wants to give us the Kingdom, and we will have treasure in that Kingdom that is proportionate to our love, generosity, kindness and saintliness.

The Sermon on the Mount tells us how to enter the Kingdom of God:

Matthew 5:3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:10 “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:19,20 Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Being able to trust God completely is part of entering into our inheritance:

Matthew 18:3-4 and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (4) Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

The Kingdom Is For Those Who Are Truly Born-Again:

John 3:3-8 Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (4) Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?” (5) Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (6) That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (7) Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ (8) The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

The Kingdom of God is not of this world (John 18:36) and flesh and blood cannot inherit it (1 Corinthians 15:50). It is a spiritual kingdom prepared by God for His righteous, generous, kind and merciful saints from before the foundation of the world. It is entered through faith, trust, humility, being poor in spirit, and by being born-again. Those who pursue Christ's righteousness to the point where they are persecuted will enter into the Kingdom of God.

We Must Do The Father's Will If We Are To Receive An Inheritance:

Matthew 7:21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 21:28-32 “What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ (29) And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went. (30) And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go. (31) Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. (32) For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.

Those Who Flagrantly Disobey The Father's Will Do Not Inherit The Kingdom Of God:

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 *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. (11) And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

Galatians 5:19-21 *Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, (20) idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, (21) envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will 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.*

There are several kinds of people that do not enter the Kingdom: Rich and selfish people do not enter (Matthew 19:23-24), the Pharisees (Matthew 5:20), the spiritually apathetic (Matthew 25:11-13), unfaithful servants (Matthew 25:28-30), those who callously ignore the needs of others (Matthew 25:44-46) and unbelievers (Hebrews 3:19) do not enter the Kingdom of God.

The Prodigal Son wasted his inheritance and the inheritance went, in the end, to the elder brother, see verse 31 below:

Luke 15:28-32 *But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, (29) but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. (30) But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' (31) And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. (32) It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'*

Paul emphasizes the importance of sanctification in his farewell speech to the Ephesian elders:

Acts 20:32 *And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.*

Seeking First the Kingdom

A certain amount of energy and dedication is required to enter the Kingdom of God. We are exhorted to seek *first* the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33, Luke 12:31). The Kingdom is compared to wedding feast to which many are invited but which few attend. Those who are distracted by the world and who have to marry a wife, or try out five yoke of oxen are banned from the banquet of the King (Luke 14:16-24, Matthew 22:1-14). In fact, many are called but few are chosen (Matthew 22:14). It is a narrow gate and few are those that find it (Matthew 7:14, Luke 13:23,24). God will send out His servants to gather people from the highways and byways (Luke 14:21-24, Matthew 22:8-10) in order to fill the banquet hall. We are to be always ready with our lamps burning for the Master's return (Luke 12:35-48). So, the foolish virgins, who fail to do this, do not enter (Matthew 25:11-13).

One of the great distractions is mistaking religion for the Kingdom. The Pharisees and Sadducees were highly religious; however, they were not seeking the Kingdom of God. They were busy manufacturing their own social, political and ecclesiastical kingdoms! They desperately wanted their power and positions in the synagogues, in the Temple or among the politicians of their day. In fact, one of their main motives for crucifying Christ was this terrifying fear of losing power:

John 11:47-48 *So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. (48) If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”*

Church growth is not the same as Kingdom growth, especially if the church growth is at the expense of smaller local churches, or is unholy or unethical, or is built on showmanship not on Christ and convictions.

Seeking first the Kingdom seems risky at first but there is a promise attached to it:

Matthew 6:33-34 *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (34) “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

Also, the terrible cost of not seeking the Kingdom and being locked out of it, must be borne in mind.

The Kingdom Is Within You

The Kingdom is now and not yet. It is here on earth now in humble forms, however it is yet to arrive in its full grandeur when Christ returns. It is often hidden, and it is growing. Jesus' parables in Matthew 13 tell us that the Kingdom of God is present amongst us now as a tiny mustard seed, as a hidden pearl of great price, as treasure hidden in a field, and as leaven in a loaf of bread. Now let's look at a controversial Scripture:

Luke 17:20-21 *Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, “The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, (21) nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is within you.”*

“Within” - Greek: “entos” – inside, as in the inside of a cup. In your soul. Also, secondarily, in the midst of a group of people. The Kingdom of God is an invisible, unobservable, non-physical, manifestation of God's Presence in your soul, and also among a group of Christian believers.

The Kingdom came amongst us in power at Pentecost, when the Spirit was poured out, and the Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance (Ephesians 1:14). At the moment, the presence of the Holy Spirit is the presence of the Kingdom; either as within an individual believer or as present in a local church, or even a group of two or three Christians in prayer. We need to be careful of “over-realized eschatology” which is thinking that the Kingdom is fully here now and that we are already reigning and ruling with Christ, this mistaken belief was rebuked by the apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 4:8).

However, there will come a day when the mustard seed becomes a great tree, and the loaf is fully leavened! Transformation will take place and the Kingdom will be enlarged and reach maturity.

Matthew 24:14 *And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*

Inheritance – Joint Heirs with Jesus Christ

Jesus Is The Heir Of All Things

Hebrews 1:1-4 *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, (2) but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. (3) He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, (4) having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.*

God created the world through Jesus Christ, who is the Word of God and the Wisdom of God. God the Father made Jesus the firstborn heir of all things. Jesus is far superior to the angels. Jesus is the Son of God and He is the exact imprint and image of God. Jesus upholds the Universe by the word of His power. He is the very radiance and glory of God. Jesus will inherit the entire Universe both material and spiritual and we will inherit all things with Him!

Romans 8:16-17 *The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, (17) and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*

2 Timothy 2:12 *if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us;*

These verses inform us that we will become fellow heirs with Christ, providing we take up our Cross and suffer with Him as godly saints who are afflicted in this present evil age.

The gospel of John and Colossians (below) state that “all things were created through Him and for Him” and that He has reconciled all things to Himself, whether on earth or in Heaven:

Colossians 1:15-20 *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. (16) For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. (17) And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (18) And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. (19) For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, (20) and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

John 1:1-3 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (2) He was in the beginning with God. (3) All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.*

Since we become sons of God and citizens of heaven, we will through the ages move into positions of authority in the universe that God created for Jesus and us His brethren (Hebrews 2:11) long ago. We are seated in heavenly realms with Christ Jesus so that “in the coming ages” He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace toward us in Christ Jesus. In other words, God has planned to take Christians “from the gutter-most to the uttermost” as some preacher has said!

Ephesians 2:4-7 *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, (5) even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— (6) and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, (7) so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

At the moment Jesus is taking back His authority from the trespassing demonic hordes that have occupied planet Earth:

1 Corinthians 15:24-26 *Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. (25) For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. (26) The last enemy to be destroyed is death.*

Ephesians 1:20-23 *that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, (21) far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. (22) And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, (23) which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

The Abrahamic Inheritance

Romans 4:13 *For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.*

Galatians 3:7-9 *Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. (8) And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” (9) So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.*

Galatians 3:29 *And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.*

God promised Abraham and his offspring that they would inherit the world, and we who are of faith are the sons of Abraham. Therefore, we will inherit the “kosmos” (the world). Our inheritance is based on our faith in Christ and God’s ancient promise to Abraham.

Authority Over The Nations

The saints inherit the earth during the Millennium and they have real and substantial authority and can rule with a rod of iron, shattering the wicked like potter’s vessels! The fact that the meek will inherit the earth is a rebuke to the dominant, the imperialists, and the egotists who use fear, greed and cruelty to build their empires. At this point there is a clear distinction between the righteous and the wicked and the justice of God will be clear and most evident. Those who keep Christ’s works to the end will be the true overcomers and conquerors:

Matthew 5:5 *“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*

Revelation 2:26-29 *The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, (27) and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. (28) And I will give him the morning star. (29) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'*

The faithful servants of God who have endured hardship for the gospel will sit in thrones:

Revelation 20:4-6 *Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (5) The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. (6) Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.*

Matthew 19:27-30 *Then Peter said in reply, "See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?" (28) Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (29) And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. (30) But many who are first will be last, and the last first.*

The holy saints of God will become kings and priests and they will reign upon the earth

Revelation 5:9-10 *And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, (10) and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."*

Reigning Forever And Ever

Revelation 22:4-5 *They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. (5) And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.*

Daniel 7:27 *And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.'*

There is also an enduring and eternal aspect to our inheritance that will go far beyond the Millennium. Since God will show us the immeasurable riches of His grace in the ages to come, we will increase in authority throughout eternity. All the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to us, the saints of the Most High.

The Inheritance Of The Saints

We are not mere slaves who receive a wage or a reward. We are also sons and daughters of the Living God who receive a glorious inheritance that we have not earned in any way, shape or form:

Galatians 4:4-7 *But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, (5) to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. (6) And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (7) So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.*

We are the sons of God and the angels are the servants of God, part of God's great household, and their current task is assisting those who will inherit such a great salvation:

Hebrews 1:13-14 *And to which of the angels has he ever said, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"? (14) Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?*

This inheritance is both predestined by God the Father and is sealed and guaranteed by the Holy Spirit of Truth:

Ephesians 1:10-14 *as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (11) In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, (12) so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. (13) In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, (14) who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.*

This inheritance can only be fully understood by supernatural wisdom and revelation, therefore we need to be in earnest prayer for a true knowledge of the glorious inheritance of the saints:

Ephesians 1:17-18 *that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, (18) having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,*

Colossians 1:12-14 *giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. (13) He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, (14) in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

This inheritance is purely by the Grace of God, and not by our own works:

Titus 3:7 *so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

However, it requires persistence in faith, we must not abandon our inheritance:

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.*

God wants us to inherit the Kingdom and to have eternal life and that is His unchangeable purpose:

Hebrews 6:17-18 *So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, (18) so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.*

This inheritance is a promised eternal inheritance, not a temporary spiritual high, and it is kept in Heaven for us and is imperishable, undefiled and unfading:

Hebrews 9:15 *Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.*

1 Peter 1:3-4 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (4) to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,*

Conclusion

Rewards and inheritances declare the goodness and love of God to us. In His kindness and mercy, He prepared these marvelous, glorious things for us from before the foundation of the world. God has a plan, and that plan is to glorify us!

Romans 8:29-30 *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (30) And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

John 17:22 *The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one,*

2 Corinthians 3:18 *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

The rewards indicate that our effort and our endurance matter to God. Our conscientiousness does not earn our salvation, but it does matter to God, and He will reward us for it. Heavenly rewards are not like a race where everyone gets the same participation trophy no matter how much effort they put in. These rewards are real rewards for running the race well, so as to win the prize!

An inheritance is not earned. Someone else earns it, and upon their death we inherit the inheritance. It is possible for a very lazy person to inherit a billion dollars if they are in the will. The inheritance of the saints goes far beyond what we could possibly be rewarded for, the resurrection body, inheriting the Kingdom of God, and ruling and reigning with Christ through all the ages to come, one after another for all eternity, so that the Lord can demonstrate His love for us (Ephesians 2:7). We are like the lazy person who inherits large fortune. The inheritance is by grace through faith. It is the Father's gift to us!

I hope that these studies have touched both your heart and your mind and caused you to pray for the things of the Spirit and not just the things of the here and now. Please share your key insights with others, preach them, teach them, and make them your own.

Study Guide

“Aim at Heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in’: aim at earth and you will get neither.” (C.S. Lewis)

This study guide is for those who want to study this book with friends, or in a small group. I have put it at the end of the ebook so that it does not interrupt the flow of reading. These in-depth studies often provoke multiple lines of thought and are best discussed in a group of half-a-dozen compatriots who exhort each other to love and good works.

Read each chapter before the meeting and jot down a few points that have startled you or impressed you, points that you want to discuss with your fellow explorers of the Word of God. This topic is so little taught on because Christians are cautious in discussing eternal rewards lest they appear covetous or less sacrificial in their faith. Well, the Bible talks extensively about them, as did the saints of old, and so should we.

Suggested Discussion Questions

Chapter One – The Nature of Rewards and Inheritances

1. What are some of the differences between a reward and an inheritance?
2. What did you learn from the diagram in Chapter One?
3. Why should we believe in eternal rewards?
4. How is God a rewarder of those that love Him and believe in Him?
5. When do we receive our eternal rewards?
6. What conditions does the Lord put on our spiritual inheritance?
7. How does the concept of rewards and inheritances give significance to our earthly lives and actions?

Chapter Two – The Disciple’s Reward

1. What does Matthew 6:1-6 tell us about how God observes and rewards faithful Christian disciples? Why should we do good deeds in private rather than in public?
2. What is the Golden Rule and how does it mark the life of a good Christian?
3. Can you come up with some good example of how God treats us in the same manner that we treat others?
4. How does Luke 6:31-36 teach us to go “above and beyond” in our love for others?
5. Luke 14:12-14 teaches us about being kind to “those whom most consider least”? What are some practical applications of this principle of discipleship?
6. What does it mean to take up our Cross and follow Jesus Christ?
7. The idea of having to “lose our life in this world” is very profound, can you think of some examples where this might prove necessary?

Chapter Three – The Servant’s Reward

1. Discuss the controversial issue of the clergy and the laity. Are some people set aside, by God, for the work of the gospel?
2. What is involved in carrying out the Master’s will? How important is being a faithful servant?
3. When are the servants of God rewarded? Discuss the parables about the king being away on a long journey then returning.
4. What is servant leadership and why is it important?
5. Read 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 and discuss the principle of “quality not quantity”?
6. What is the crown of glory?
7. How is sacrificial service a part of the calling of those who preach the gospel?

Chapter Four – The Overcomer’s Reward

1. What is an overcomer (in spiritual terms)?
2. Who overcomes the Strong Man?
3. Why do we need to overcome the world?
4. Do you think that we are in a time of spiritual deception? How can we overcome it?
5. What is involved in overcoming sin and End Times persecution?
6. How do the saints overcome Satan?
7. What is our Final Victory?

Chapter Five – Inheritance: The Resurrection Body

1. How is the spiritual resurrection body very different from the earthly body we have now? What is the difference between the body of Adam and the body of the Heavenly Man?
2. Why can’t flesh and blood inherit the Kingdom of God?
3. How will the resurrection body enable us to reign and rule with Christ?
4. List at least five characteristics of the resurrection body.
5. When do we receive the resurrection body? How quickly is this change accomplished?
6. Why is reincarnation totally unbiblical?
7. What is our Christian hope?

Chapter Six – Inheritance: The Kingdom of God

1. What is the Kingdom of God? Is there any difference between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven?
2. What is meant by “the Kingdom of God is within you”?
3. How do we enter the Kingdom of God?
4. How important is it to obey the will of our Father who is in heaven?
5. Who does NOT get to enter the Kingdom of God?
6. Why do we need to be born-again?
7. What is involved in “seeking first the Kingdom of God”?

Chapter Seven – Inheritance: Joint Heirs with Jesus Christ

1. What does it mean that Jesus Christ is the heir of all things in Heaven and on Earth?
2. How are we joint heirs with Jesus Christ? What are the conditions for this?
3. What is the Abrahamic inheritance?
4. Who receives authority over the nations?
5. What is the inheritance of the saints?
6. How do we reign forever and ever?
7. How does the good news of this vast inheritance make you feel?