



Summer of Lies – How Lies are Told to Us
Week 17: When the Concept of Godly Rewards Gets Twisted

- LIE#1:** God uses shame to correct me and change me.
- LIE#2:** God is not concerned with my everyday life, only the things I do for Him.
- LIE#3:** Women are not Created to be Leaders
- LIE#4:** You MUST be Married to Please God
- LIE#5:** All I Need is God, Who Needs Friends.
- LIE#6:** God Doesn't Speak to People Today. It was just for Biblical Times.
- LIE#7:** A Man is the Priest of His Home and a Covering for His Family. All a Woman needs to do is be Submissive.
- LIE#8:** God is angry.
- LIE#9:** I Have to Earn God's Love
- LIE#10:** God Hates Divorced People
- LIE#11:** God Doesn't Care What I Do With My Money
- LIE#12:** If God is all powerful, why do bad things happen?
- LIEW#13:** I Need Jesus. But....
- LIEW#14:** How Lies are Told to Us: LIED to by: The Devil
- LIEW#15:** How Lies are Told to Us: LIED to by: Ourselves
- LIEW#16:** How Lies are Told to Us: LIED to by: The World

Week 17: When the Concept of Godly Rewards Gets Twisted

Before we get to what the rewards are, we need to define:

- I. **Why are Godly rewards given?**
- II. **When and Where are they given?**

When: During the Marriage Supper of the Lamb

Where: At the actual Judgement Seat of Christ

- III. **How Lies Twist**

Prosperity Gospel overview:

Seed Faith:

- IV. **WHAT ARE THE REWARDS:**

Before we get to what the rewards are, we need to define:

- I. **Why are Godly rewards given?**

SL#2

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

²⁴ Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.²⁵ And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.

²⁶ Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. ²⁷ But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

SL#3

Christian Life = One of Discipline or One of License

Define Discipline:

The practice of training people to obey rules or a code of behavior, using punishment to correct disobedience.

Control. Regulate. Direct. Order. Authority. Instruct. Exercise. Regiment. Control. Rule. Routine.

Train. Strict. Teach. Drill. Self-restraint. Self-control. Obedience.

- activity or experience that provides mental or physical training.



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25 Many English VSS translate ὁ ἀγωνιζόμενος as *athlete* (NRSV, NJB) as against AV/KJV, *man that striveth for the mastery*.

NRSV

²⁴ Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. ²⁵ Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. ²⁶ So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air, ²⁷ but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.

CEB

²⁴ Don't you know that all the runners in the stadium run, but only one gets the prize? So run to win. ²⁵ Everyone who competes practices self-discipline in everything. The runners do this to get a crown of leaves that shrivel up and die, but we do it to receive a crown that never dies. ²⁶ So now this is how I run—not without a clear goal in sight. I fight like a boxer in the ring, not like someone who is shadowboxing. ²⁷ Rather, I'm landing punches on my own body and subduing it like a slave. I do this to be sure that I myself won't be disqualified after preaching to others.

Define License:

Grant a license to (someone or something) to permit the use of something or to allow an activity to take place.

Permit. Allow. Authorize. Grant. Give the right to. Warrant. Permission. Empower. Entitle. Validate. Stamp of approval. Certify. Recognize. O.K. Let. Sanction.

A permit from an authority to own or use something, do a particular thing, or carry on a trade Permit. Authorize. Authority.

Notes:

Thiselton, A. C. (2000). [The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text](#) (pp. 710–715). W.B. Eerdmans.

Greco-Roman: Isthmian games.

Straub, Pfitzner, and others agree that the central issue here is the need for ἐγκράτεια, **self-control**, or in some contexts *abstinence*.

- Paul uses οὐκ οἴδατε, *do you not know, are you not aware*, as a rhetorical question which provokes the addressees to notice afresh what **they know perfectly well if they take note or reflect**.
- In a RACE: ἐν σταδίῳ **in a stadium** (alludes to) or *in a race*,
- The **stadium** in which the pan-hellenic Isthmian games were held.
- The **stadium** would include not only foot races (οἱ ἐν σταδίῳ τρέχοντες ... τρέχουσιν) but also athletic contests of other kinds (e.g., boxing).
- Murphy-O'Connor discusses the Isthmian games in detail, concluding: "Paul could not have been unaware of the Isthmian games, and was probably in Corinth when they took place; they were celebrated in the spring of AD 49 and 51. Athletic metaphors were a commonplace in the popular philosophy of the period ... but it can hardly be coincidence that Paul's first sustained development of this theme occurs in a letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 9:24–27)."
- Isthmian Games were one of the four great pan-hellenic festivals, ranking second only to the Olympic Games and above those of Delphi and Nemea.



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- The prestige of the Games was enhanced by a tradition which went back to the sixth century BC, and they took place every two years, up to 146 BC at Corinth (when the Romans laid Corinth waste).
- For more than a century the Games were held at Sicyon, some six miles to the northwest, **after the resettlement of 44 BC the influence of Corinth upon the Games steadily increased until it recovered their administration** during the first decade of the first century.
- Financial impact of the Games:
 - Renovation of buildings
 - Banquets “for all the inhabitants of the colony” by a Corinthian patron.
 - Tradespeople made \$\$\$ due to the huge crowds who stayed in the City
- Games held every alternate spring
- Archaeological remains of the site at Isthmia
 - the special system of starting the race (the device called *balbides*),
- Patronage in honor of Poseidon
- Corinth was a major tourist attraction

It is a “WE” portion of scripture. We as the Body of Christ...do what?
Yearn for the “crown that fades”? (License)

There is strong evidence that at the Isthmian Games the **crown** or *garland* given to the winner was made first from plastered pine leaves, although perhaps later from “celery.” Paul uses the cognate noun ἐν φθορᾷ in 1 Cor 15:42 (cf. also 15:53) to describe the mode of being or σώμα which decays, in contrast to resurrection ἐν ἀφθαρσίᾳ.

Or live with the conviction : Everything for the sake of the Gospel, that which NEVER fades away.

All of this contributes to the main point that **everyone who enters as a combatant exercises self-control** (ἐγκρατεύεται) **in everything** (πάντα, accusative of respect). As Pfitzner notes, “πάντα ἐγκρατεύεται in v. 25 directly takes up the catchword sounded in vv. 12b, 19 and 22b–23 and provides an illustration of the Apostle’s principal [sic]: *everything* for the sake of the Gospel—including the right use of his liberty in the renunciation of his rights” (his italics and spelling).

Rewards are given for:

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- I. Why are Godly rewards given?
- II. When or Where are they given?

SL#5

Luke 14:14

And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

CEB¹⁴ And you will be blessed because they can't repay you. Instead, you will be repaid when the just are resurrected."

A. When: During the Marriage Supper of the Lamb:

(The Passover as foreshadowing the marriage supper of the Lamb.)

SL#6

Revelation 19:6-9

⁶ And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!" ⁷ Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." ⁸ And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

⁹ Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!' " And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God."

- What is the Marriage Supper of the Lamb?

{An actual meal in Heaven, is the final manifestation of the marriage of Christ and His wife. This culminates their initial relationship, likened to an engagement which was a legal arrangement in Jewish culture. This follows the coming of Christ as Bridegroom in the Rapture of the church before the Great Tribulation and precedes His return seven years later to establish His millennial kingdom.}

- When does it happen? *{Follows the Rapture and before His Triumphant Coming.}*
- What are we really doing? *{What we do during the Tribulation.}*

[Passover as foreshadowing the marriage supper of the Lamb: **Matt. 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:7-20]**

Matt. 26:29

I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." cr: Mark 14:25; Luke 22:7-20.

2 Corinthians 11:2 (Presentation of the Bride of Christ)

² For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

SL#7

1 Corinthians 3:12-15

¹⁰ According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. ¹¹ For no other foundation can anyone lay 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 will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. ¹⁴ If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

B. Where: Given at the Judgment Seat of Christ



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SL#8

2 Corinthians 5:10

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

James 1:22 *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."

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A. Prosperity Gospel overview:

Got Questions Ministries. (2002–2013). [Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered](#). Logos Bible Software.

From Got questions:

The roots of the Word of Faith movement and the name it and claim it message have more in common with new age metaphysics than with biblical Christianity.

[MY NOTE: AND BAAL WORSHIP ¹ Bridger, G. (2010). [The Message of Obadiah, Nahum and Zephaniah: The Kindness and Severity of God](#) (A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.; pp. 199–201). Inter-Varsity Press.]

However, instead of us creating our reality with our thoughts, as new age proponents advise, name it and claim it teachers tell us that we can use the “power of faith” to create our own reality or get what we want. [Our thoughts control reality]

In essence faith is redefined from trusting in a holy and sovereign God despite our circumstances to a way of controlling God to give us what we want.

Faith becomes a force whereby we can get what we want rather than an abiding trust in God even during times of trials and suffering.

IS THIS INSULTING TO A SOVEREIGN GOD?

Ash, C. (2014). [Job: The Wisdom of the Cross](#) (R. K. Hughes, Ed.; pp. 19–21). Crossway.

A Ghanaian student at Cornhill told me that some weddings in his country replace the traditional wording of the wedding vows with the words, “For better, for best, for richer, for richest” because they cannot countenance the possibility that there may, for a Christian couple, be anything “worse” or “poorer.”

So that is the prosperity gospel. If I am poor (financially and materially poor) and I come to Jesus, Jesus will make me rich. If I am sick, and I pray to Jesus, Jesus will make me well. If I want a wife or a husband, and I ask Jesus for one, he will give me a wife or husband. If a couple wants children and call out to Jesus, Jesus will give them children. And so on. This, according to the prosperity gospel, is what he has promised.

- When Humans define “enough” “rich” “wealth”:
 - What are European standards of Wealth? Wealthy?
 - What are American standards of Wealth? Wealthy?



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- What are 3rd world standards of Wealth? Wealthy?

Enough to buy a...
 Roof over my head and enough food.
 Education.
 Adequate clothing.
 [A little more than others have...]

SL#9

Matthew 16:24-26

Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. ²⁵ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. ²⁶ For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

Mark 8:34 NKJV

When He had called the people to *Himself*, with His disciples also, He said to them, “Whoever...

Luke 9:23 NKJV

Then He said to *them* all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up...

Acts 14:22 NKJV

strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and saying...

2 Corinthians 4:10 NKJV

always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may...

2 Corinthians 4:11 NKJV

For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may...

1 Thessalonians 3:3 NKJV

that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed...

SL#10

2 Timothy 3:12

¹² Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

2 Corinthians 4:8-11

⁸ We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— ¹⁰ always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. ¹¹ For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

1 John 2:15

¹⁵ Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

SL#11



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Philippians 3:7-8

⁷ But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. ⁸ Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ

Matthew 6:19-21

¹⁹ “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

SL#12

Luke 14:25-33

²⁵ Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, ²⁶ “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. ²⁷ And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. ²⁸ For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it— ²⁹ lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish’? ³¹ Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. ³³ So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.

B. Seed Faith:

SL#13

2 Chronicles 25:9

⁹ Then Amaziah said to the man of God, “But what shall we do about the hundred talents which I have given to the troops of Israel?” And the man of God answered, “The Lord is able to give you much more than this.”

WHEN I PLANT _____ , GOD DOES MORE.

SL#14a

2 Samuel 24:24

²⁴ Then the king said to Araunah, [a Ru’ nah] “No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God with that which costs me nothing.” So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.

Hayford: Giving to God

First, it should be our best. When we give God our best, we are in a position to expect His best back into our lives.

Second, we should give to God first. The very first thought in our minds after we have received something should be how we can give a portion of our harvest to the work of the Lord.



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Third, our giving should be generous, freely from our heart and without expecting anything back from the one to whom we give. As Jesus said to His disciples, “Freely you have received, freely give” (Matt. 10:8). 1

SL#14b

Mark 11:22-24

22 So Jesus answered and said to them, “Have faith in God.²³ For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. ²⁴ Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.

SL#15

Galatians 6:7

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

¹ Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). [Spirit filled life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., Ga 6:6). Thomas Nelson.

God Has a Due Season for All of the Seeds You Plant—Good Seeds As Well As Bad Seeds,

First, God will cause a harvest to come from our seeds.

Second, God is never early or late—He is always right on time with our best interests at heart. [SOVEREIGNTY]

Third, our harvest will have the same nature as our seeds sown: good seeds bring good harvests, bad seeds bring bad harvests.

What are we to do during the growing time of our seeds?

- 1) Refuse to become discouraged.
- 2) Determine to keep our faith alive and active.
- 3) Give and keep on giving; love and keep on loving.

Know this—His harvest is guaranteed. Continue in an attitude of expectancy.

MUCH MORE ON SEED FAITH IN THE NOTES

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Prosperity Gospel overview:

Seed Faith:

- IV. **WHAT ARE THE REWARDS:**

¹ Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). [Spirit filled life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., 2 Sa 24:18). Thomas Nelson.



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IV. WHAT ARE THE REWARDS:

SL#16

Expecting rewards is trusting His sovereignty

SL#17

Timing:

- Here and now?
- Future?
- Heaven?

Defining:

- Is something actually listed?
- Or is it just “rewards”? [= trust me]

New Testament:

1. **Matthew 5:12**

Rejoice and be glad, because great is your **reward** in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. [Matthew 5:11-13](#) (in Context) [Matthew 5](#) (Whole Chapter)

2. **Matthew 5:46**

If you love those who love you, what **reward** will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? [Matthew 5:45-47](#) (in Context) [Matthew 5](#) (Whole Chapter)

3. **Matthew 6:1**

[*Giving to the Needy*] "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no **reward** from your Father in heaven. [Matthew 6:1-3](#) (in Context) [Matthew 6](#) (Whole Chapter)

4. **Matthew 6:2**

"So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their **reward** in full.

[Matthew 6:1-3](#) (in Context) [Matthew 6](#) (Whole Chapter)

5. **Matthew 6:4**

so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will **reward** you. [Matthew 6:3-5](#) (in Context) [Matthew 6](#) (Whole Chapter)

6. **Matthew 6:5**

[*Prayer*] "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their **reward** in full.

[Matthew 6:4-6](#) (in Context) [Matthew 6](#) (Whole Chapter)

7. **Matthew 6:6**

But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will **reward** you. [Matthew 6:5-7](#) (in Context) [Matthew 6](#) (Whole Chapter)

8. **Matthew 6:16**

[*Fasting*] "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their **reward** in full. [Matt. 6:15-17](#) (in Context) [Matt 6](#) (Whole Chapter)

9. **Matthew 6:18**

so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your



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Father, who sees what is done in secret, will **reward** you. [Matthew 6:17-19](#) (in Context) [Matthew 6](#) (Whole Chapter)

10. **[Matthew 10:41](#)**

Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's **reward**, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's **reward**.

[Matthew 10:40-42](#) (in Context) [Matthew 10](#) (Whole Chapter)

11. **[Matthew 10:42](#)**

And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his **reward**." [Matthew 10:41-42](#) (in Context) [Matthew 10](#) (Whole Chapter)

12. **[Matthew 16:27](#)**

For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will **reward** each person according to what he has done. [Matthew 16:26-28](#) (in Context) [Matthew 16](#) (Whole Chapter)

13. **[Mark 9:41](#)**

I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his **reward**. [Mark 9:40-42](#) (in Context) [Mark 9](#) (Whole Chapter)

14. **[Luke 6:23](#)**

"Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your **reward** in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets. [Luke 6:22-24](#) (in Context) [Luke 6](#) (Whole Chapter)

15. **[Luke 6:35](#)**

But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your **reward** will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. [Luke 6:34-36](#) (in Context) [Luke 6](#) (Whole Chapter)

16. **[Acts 1:18](#)**

(With the **reward** he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. [Acts 1:17-19](#) (in Context) [Acts 1](#) (Whole Chapter)

17. **[1 Corinthians 3:14](#)**

If what he has built survives, he will receive his **reward**. [1 Cor. 3:13-15](#) (in Context) [1 Corinthians 3](#) (Whole Chapter)

18. **[1 Corinthians 9:17](#)**

If I preach voluntarily, I have a **reward**; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me.

[1 Corinthians 9:16-18](#) (in Context) [1 Corinthians 9](#) (Whole Chapter)

19. **[1 Corinthians 9:18](#)**

What then is my **reward**? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it. [1 Corinthians 9:17-19](#) (in Context) [1 Corinthians 9](#) (Whole Chapter)

20. **[Ephesians 6:8](#)**

because you know that the Lord will **reward** everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

[Ephesians 6:7-9](#) (in Context) [Ephesians 6](#) (Whole Chapter)

21. **[Colossians 3:24](#)**

since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a **reward**. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

[Colossians 3:23-25](#) (in Context) [Colossians 3](#) (Whole Chapter)



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22. **Hebrews 11:26**
He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his **reward**. [Hebrews 11:25-27](#) (in Context) [Hebrews 11](#) (Whole Chapter)
23. **Revelation 22:12**
"Behold, I am coming soon! My **reward** is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.
[Revelation 22:11-13](#) (in Context) [Revelation 22](#) (Whole Chapter)

Old Testament

1. **Genesis 15:1**
[*God's Covenant With Abram*] After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great **reward**." [Genesis 15:1-3](#) (in Context) [Genesis 15](#) (Whole Chapter)
2. **Leviticus 26:1**
[*Reward for Obedience*] "Do not make idols or set up an image or a sacred stone for yourselves, and do not place a carved stone in your land to bow down before it. I am the LORD your God. [Lev. 26:1-3](#) (in Cntxt) [Lev. 26](#) (Chapter)
3. **Numbers 24:11**
Now leave at once and go home! I said I would **reward** you handsomely, but the LORD has kept you from being **rewarded**." [Numbers 24:10-12](#) (in Context) [Numbers 24](#) (Whole Chapter)
4. **1 Samuel 24:19**
When a man finds his enemy, does he let him get away unharmed? May the LORD **reward** you well for the way you treated me today. [1 Samuel 24:18-20](#) (in Context) [1 Samuel 24](#) (Whole Chapter)
5. **2 Samuel 19:36**
Your servant will cross over the Jordan with the king for a short distance, but why should the king **reward** me in this way? [2 Samuel 19:35-37](#) (in Context) [2 Samuel 19](#) (Whole Chapter)
6. **Job 17:5**
If a man denounces his friends for **reward**, the eyes of his children will fail. [Job 17:4-6](#) (in Cntxt) [Job 17](#) (Chapter)
7. **Job 34:33**
Should God then **reward** you on your terms, when you refuse to repent? You must decide, not I; so tell me what you know. [Job 34:32-34](#) (in Context) [Job 34](#) (Whole Chapter)
8. **Psalms 17:14**
O LORD, by your hand save me from such men, from men of this world whose **reward** is in this life. You still the hunger of those you cherish; their sons have plenty, and they store up wealth for their children. [Psalm 17:13-15](#) (in Context) [Psalm 17](#) (Whole Chapter)
9. **Psalms 19:11**
By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great **reward**. [Psalm 19:10-12](#) (in Cntxt) [Psalm 19](#) (Chapter)
10. **Psalms 62:12**
and that you, O Lord, are loving. Surely you will **reward** each person according to what he has done. [Psalm 62:11-12](#) (in Context) [Psalm 62](#) (Whole Chapter)
11. **Psalms 127:3**
Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a **reward** from him. [Psalm 127:2-4](#) (in Cntxt) [Psalm 127](#) (Whole Chapter)
12. **Proverbs 9:12**
If you are wise, your wisdom will **reward** you; if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer."
[Proverbs 9:11-13](#) (in Context) [Proverbs 9](#) (Whole Chapter)



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13. **Proverbs 11:18**
The wicked man earns deceptive wages, but he who sows righteousness reaps a sure **reward**.
[Proverbs 11:17-19](#) (in Context) [Proverbs 11](#) (Whole Chapter)
14. **Proverbs 13:21**
Misfortune pursues the sinner, but prosperity is the **reward** of the righteous.
[Proverbs 13:20-22](#) (in Context) [Proverbs 13](#) (Whole Chapter)
15. **Proverbs 19:17**
He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will **reward** him for what he has done.
[Proverbs 19:16-18](#) (in Context) [Proverbs 19](#) (Whole Chapter)
16. **Proverbs 25:22**
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will **reward** you.
[Proverbs 25:21-23](#) (in Context) [Proverbs 25](#) (Whole Chapter)
17. **Proverbs 31:31**
Give her the **reward** she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.
[Proverbs 31:30-31](#) (in Context) [Proverbs 31](#) (Whole Chapter)
18. **Ecclesiastes 2:10**
I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the **reward** for all my labor. [Ecclesiastes 2:9-11](#) (in Context) [Ecclesiastes 2](#) (Whole Chapter)
19. **Ecclesiastes 9:5**
For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further **reward**, and even the memory of them is forgotten. [Ecclesiastes 9:4-6](#) (in Context) [Ecclesiastes 9](#) (Whole Chapter)
20. **Isaiah 40:10**
See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his **reward** is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. [Isaiah 40:9-11](#) (in Context) [Isaiah 40](#) (Whole Chapter)
21. **Isaiah 45:13**
I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or **reward**, says the LORD Almighty." [Isaiah 45:12-14](#) (in Context) [Isaiah 45](#) (Whole Chapter)
22. **Isaiah 49:4**
But I said, "I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing. Yet what is due me is in the LORD's hand, and my **reward** is with my God." [Isaiah 49:3-5](#) (in Context) [Isaiah 49](#) (Whole Chapter)
23. **Isaiah 61:8**
"For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity. In my faithfulness I will **reward** them and make an everlasting covenant with them. [Isaiah 61:7-9](#) (in Context) [Isaiah 61](#) (Whole Chapter)
24. **Isaiah 62:11**
The LORD has made proclamation to the ends of the earth: "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your Savior comes! See, his **reward** is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.'" [Isaiah 62:10-12](#) (in Context) [Isaiah 62](#) (Whole Chapter)
25. **Jeremiah 17:10**
"I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to **reward** a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve." [Jeremiah 17:9-11](#) (in Context) [Jeremiah 17](#) (Whole Chapter)
26. **Jeremiah 32:19**
great are your purposes and mighty are your deeds. Your eyes are open to all the ways of men; you **reward** everyone according to his conduct and as his deeds deserve. [Jeremiah 32:18-20](#) (in Context) [Jeremiah 32](#) (Whole Chapter)
27. **Ezekiel 29:20**
I have given him Egypt as a **reward** for his efforts because he and his army did it for me, declares the Sovereign LORD.
[Ezekiel 29:19-21](#) (in Context) [Ezekiel 29](#) (Whole Chapter)



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Gerig, W. L. (1996). [Reward](#). In *Evangelical dictionary of biblical theology* (electronic ed., pp. 685–687). Baker Book House.

An Identification of the Rewards. The rewards to be given out for faithful service at the *bēma* judgment are dealt with in various ways.

Those spoken of in terms of “crowns” are nonmaterial, thus doing away with their being materialistic motives for divine service. The “crowns” that are biblically identified as being given on that day include: a **crowns** that will last forever for those who have kept their sinful nature in check (1 Cor. 9:25–27); a **crowns** of righteousness for those who have longed for Christ’s appearance (2 Tim. 4:8); a **crowns** of life for those who have endured testing successfully, even to the point of death (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10); a **crowns** of rejoicing for those who have seen souls saved (1 Thess. 2:19); and a **crowns** of glory for those who have faithfully served God’s people (1 Peter 5:4).

In other places, the rewards are spoken of as “treasures in heaven” (Matt. 6:20), a share in Christ’s future role (Rev. 2:26–27), and additional responsibilities and words of praise (“Well done, good and faithful servant”; Matt. 25:21, 23; Luke 19:17, 19). It is worth noting again how intangible and immaterial these rewards are. Even the gift of eternal life is set forth as a prize to be gained. Eternal life is something to be laid hold of by the individual (1 Tim. 6:17–19).

While emphasizing the future rewards, it is also well to remember that there are **many good results that come to the faithful believer in this life, things that can be called “rewards.”** Jesus said that he had come that his own might have life and have it to the full (John 10:10). He also said that if his own would continue to seek first his Father’s kingdom and his righteousness, all the temporal things they needed would be given to them as well (Matt. 6:33).

SL#18

Matthew 25:21-33

²¹ His lord said to him, ‘**Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.**’ ²² He also who had received two talents came and said, ‘Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.’ ²³ His lord said to him, ‘**Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.**’

²⁴ “Then he who had received the one talent came and said, ‘Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed.’ ²⁵ And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.’

²⁶ “But his lord answered and said to him, ‘You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed.’ ²⁷ So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. ²⁸ So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents.

²⁹ ‘For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. ³⁰ And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’



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SL#19

1 Timothy 6:17-19

¹⁷ Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. ¹⁸ Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, ¹⁹ storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

John 6:1

⁶ “Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

SL#20

John 6:5-15

⁵ “And when you pray, you shall not be like the [Ⓜ]hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ⁶ But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. ⁷ And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.

⁸ “Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. ⁹ In this manner, therefore, pray:

*Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.*

¹⁰ Your kingdom come.

Your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts,

As we forgive our debtors.

¹³ And do not lead us into temptation,

But deliver us from the evil one.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

¹⁴ “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

SL#21

Matthew 6:33

*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,
and all these things shall be added to you.*



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NOTES:

In 9:24–27 Paul appeals to an example drawn from Graeco-Roman competitive pursuits, namely, the **Isthmian games**. Straub, Pfitzner, and others agree that the central issue here is the need for ἐγκράτεια, **self-control**, or in some contexts *abstinence* (see below).

After establishing the recognizable need for ἐγκράτεια from Graeco-Roman culture and recreation, Paul will turn in 10:1–13 to a third category of example, namely, scriptural warnings which arise from Israel’s biblical history. The climactic statement that only one receives the prize has nothing to do with any theology of exclusivism or elitism, but serves as part of the analogical picture which provides the setting for the notion of the urgency and strength of motivation which leads the athlete to surrender lesser goods in order to attain the higher goal. Paul has just defined this highest goal as the gospel and all that the gospel embodies, represents, and brings about. To hinder this by self-indulgence or by standing on one’s rights is to be like an athlete who allows distractions to undermine the whole purpose of entering for the race. Theories about the origin and background of Paul’s imagery and its relation to Graeco-Roman religion and literature (e.g., by Broneer and Funke) are described below. What is clear is that the prestige and commercial benefit of the Isthmian games to which the analogies doubtless allude would be very familiar to the readers at Corinth.²

aphthartos [ἄφθαρτος, 862]

aphthartos is an adjective meaning “incorruptible,” “immortal” in seven places. Rom. 1:23; 1 Tim. 1:17 describe God as “incorruptible.” The “incorruptible,” “immortal” condition of the resurrected believer is noted in 1 Cor. 9:25; 1 Pet. 1:23. The “incorruptible” or “imperishable” inheritance of eternal life is indicated in 1 Pet. 1:4; 1 Cor. 9:25. See also 1 Pet. 3:4.

aphanizō [ἀφανίζω, 853]

aphanizō is a verb meaning to “make disappear” or “put out of sight.” It is translated “corrupt” or “destroy” with general reference to the destructive activity of moths and corrosion in Matt. 6:19, 20.³

9. Freedom to restrict our freedom

9:1–27

Paul’s great cry for Christian freedom is continued in this chapter. He is chiefly concerned with his own freedom to restrict his freedom for the sake of the gospel. He is expansive about his rights, thus echoing if not parodying the watchword of the Corinthians, but he concludes his whole argument with the self-discipline which this must promote (9:24–27). In fact, the real climax of Paul’s argument in this section is the challenge of 11:1, ‘Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.’

1. Paul’s freedom in Christ (9:1–6)

There were those at Corinth, as we know, who were constantly questioning the authority of Paul, especially his claim to be an apostle. They reckoned that they had far better credentials than he. They claimed to be apostles on far stronger grounds. Their idea of an apostle was a man with authority, who let everybody know that he was in authority. They lorded it over everyone; anyone who did not act in the same way could not possibly be intended to carry responsibility in the church. They saw Christian leadership in terms of being masters, not servants. They slated Paul because he was not like that; he was too ‘weak’, too ‘soft’, too willing to deny himself his freedom in Christ for the sake of others.

² Thiselton, A. C. (2000). *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 709). W.B. Eerdmans.

³ *Corrupt, Corruption, Incorruptible*. (2005). In S. D. Renn (Ed.), *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words: Word Studies for Key English Bible Words Based on the Hebrew and Greek Texts* (p. 214). Hendrickson Publishers.



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So Paul explains precisely how he sees his freedom in Christ, especially how he has deliberately, and freely, chosen to restrict his freedom for the benefit of others. This, he maintains, is a sign of strength, not of weakness.

Throughout the passage Paul is talking of his rights as an apostle, rather than as any ordinary Christian. He has seen *Jesus our Lord*, and the sheer existence of the church at Corinth evidences the authenticity of his apostolic activity: these Corinthian Christians are, in fact, *the seal of my apostleship in the Lord* (2)—a seal being that which stamps something as specially belonging to someone. Paul, if anyone, has a special right to claim the church at Corinth as his own responsibility and sphere of influence. He was the first to come all the way to them with the gospel, albeit with much fear and trembling; he had been through a great deal of personal pressure in order to see the church of Christ planted in such a city; he had given himself unstintingly for the total welfare of these people. But still he refused to claim his rights as an apostle.

What precisely were these rights? Paul lists three essential rights in the next three verses (4–6), the right to food and drink, to have one's wife present in a travelling ministry, and to have the freedom not to work for a living. *Do we not have a right to our food and drink?* he asks (4). Paul seems to be rather on the defensive. This is borne out in his use of the word *apologia* (3) to describe his procedure in this chapter; he is, indeed, answering charges about the legitimacy and the effectiveness of his apostleship. It is never easy to have one's whole ministry called into question, let alone written off. This is not the only time that Paul had to answer for his ministry to people who ought to have known better. The mere fact that he was prepared to spend time and thought, giving a defence to those who would examine him on his basic credentials as an apostle of Jesus Christ, stresses the essential meekness of the man.

The second apostolic right is of some interest: *Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a wife, as the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?* (5). Are the Lord's brothers sons of Joseph by an earlier marriage or (more likely) later sons of Joseph and Mary? Did Peter make a habit of travelling around with his wife, and did that fact contribute to the emergence of a Peter-party? It is from such personal, rather than theological, distinctives that divisions in the church so frequently arise. Was Paul, in fact, the odd man out in travelling on his own without the practical support of a wife to look after him? Is the rsv margin suggestively correct in talking of Paul having 'a sister as wife'? And does that refer to Christian women who gave themselves to this supportive ministry, rather like Susanna, Joanna, Mary Magdalene and 'many others' who had provided for Jesus 'out of their means'?⁴ Or does it refer to Paul's actual sister who gave him this sacrificial support year in, year out? Whatever the answer to these questions, it seems obvious that a true apostle could legitimately claim proper care and maintenance for his wife as well as for himself—a practice which could well be followed with more sensitivity today when local churches benefit from travelling ministers.

In his third use of the word *exousia* (= right) in these three verses, Paul stressed the propriety of not having to work at an ordinary job in order to sustain his preaching ministry. In this way he avoided being any burden on the local church (6). We know, especially from the Acts of the Apostles, that Paul often worked long hours in a very enervating climate in order to get a local congregation off the ground. This was particularly true in Ephesus, a subtropical city where not much of any consequence normally happened during the hours of siesta (11 a. m. to 4 p. m.)—as indeed happens regularly today in many similar places in Latin and Latin American countries. At these 'dead' hours (if the rsv margin reflects accurately what took place) Paul daily argued in the Hall of Tyrannus, in the middle of a full day's manual labour as a leathermaker.⁵ Paul was able, at the end of those exhausting two-to-three years in Ephesus, to claim, 'I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities, and to those who were with me.' He made the same claim at Thessalonica,⁷ and it was of paramount importance to the overall witness of the gospel at Thessalonica that he did thus model a pattern of sheer hard work and of dependence on nobody. There was a surfeit of 'eschatological parasites' in Macedonia, idlers who were waiting around for the return of Christ.

Rights, rights, rights—Paul had many, and claimed none. Incidentally, the mention of *Barnabas* in 9:6 is intriguing, not so much for any hint of reconciliation between these two great men after their blazing row (*paroxysmos* = paroxysm) over John Mark, but because we know that Barnabas was a very wealthy landowner.¹⁰ It is likely that Christians as touchy as the Corinthians thought it rather presumptuous for a man of considerable means to take advantage of their hospitality. If he was going to be a preacher of the gospel, they might have said, the least he could do was pay his own way.

2. Forgoing his rights (9:7–18)



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The Corinthians needed some strong arguments to prise them free from their rights and their acquisitive attitude towards being Christians. So Paul adduces five solid reasons, as he argues initially that these rights lie entirely within his legitimate province: **common practice, scriptural precept, intrinsic justice, Jewish custom and Christ's command.**

i. Common practice (7)

The three metaphors here are all common biblical ones for the Christian ministry: soldier, farmer and shepherd. A fourth, equally common one (athlete), comes at the end of the chapter (9:24–25). Whichever picture of a Christian minister he takes, Paul is arguing **it is only right for the person to receive the appropriate 'perks'**: the soldier gets his equipment and his uniform, without which he cannot fight; the farmer, particularly the fruit-farmer, will not go to market to purchase some of his own apples; the shepherd will have the bulk of his breakfast from the good things he has produced. What could be fairer, more normal, more proper? If it did not happen, the neighbours would reckon that someone needed his head examining!

ii. Scriptural precept (8–10)

It is not only a matter of good rural common sense; the Lord of the harvest has laid down the law himself. Paul may appear to put it in a roundabout way, but the message is clear: You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain. Why not? Because hard workers deserve to be rewarded for their labours. God did not add that particular piece to the Deuteronomic law merely to make sure that oxen were properly looked after. He was explaining a principle: it was written for our sake (10). Both ploughman and thresher should expect to receive a share of the profits, doubtless in kind. God had said so in his law; it was not just the milk of human kindness, but the method of divine sharing. After all, it is 'God who gives the growth'.

iii. Intrinsic justice (11–12)

Paul's next argument in effect asks the Corinthians how much store they place by the gospel: What does it mean to you to have been brought from darkness to light? What do all these 'spiritual blessings' mean to you? Is there any gratitude in your heart for 'the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus'? One of the most instinctive habits in believers is the gift of hospitality and generosity: if we have been on the receiving end of spiritual blessing, we want to demonstrate our thankfulness to God in tangible ways.

In agricultural communities the area pastor (and in Africa the bishop in particular) will not return from his itinerant ministry without a few chickens, a sheep and a liberal supply of fruit and vegetables. Is such a 'harvest' so unreasonable, asks Paul? He knows in his heart that the Corinthians are completely accustomed to making this kind of 'love-offering' (as it is often called today): that much is evident from the not-so-veiled remark in verse 12, *If others share this rightful claim upon you, do not we still more?* There were obviously others at Corinth who operated in this way with a fair degree of shamelessness, bringing this or that ministry and expecting to have a fairly substantial reward for their labours. These people had nothing like the same claims upon the Corinthians in terms of gospel-blessings as Paul; but there was no hint of questioning their rights (*exousias*, 12).

Furthermore, Jesus himself had endorsed the same intrinsic right in his statement to the Seventy: 'Remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the labourer deserves his wages.'

iv. Jewish custom (13)

The Corinthians needed to look no further than the Jewish temple to see the same principle in daily operation. In fact, it is likely that this was virtually common-place, whichever temple you visited in the city. Paul, however, probably had the temple at Jerusalem chiefly in his mind. The Lord had told Aaron, 'Behold, I have given you whatever is kept of the offerings made to me ...; I have given them to you as a portion, and to your sons as a perpetual due. This shall be yours of the most holy things, reserved from the fire; every offering of theirs, every cereal offering ... every sin offering ... every guilt offering ... shall be most holy to you and to your sons.... All the best of the oil, ... of



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the wine and of the grain, the first fruits of what they give to the LORD, I give to you. The first ripe fruits of all that is in their land ... shall be yours.’ The list is long and thorough, and is followed by a similar injunction to the Levites: ‘To the Levites I have given every tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service which they serve, their service in the tent of meeting.’¹⁷

v. *Christ’s command (14)*

Paul’s clinching argument is, even to the Corinthians, incontrovertible: the Lord Jesus himself has laid it down that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. ‘You received without paying, give without pay. Take no gold, nor silver, nor copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor a staff; for the labourer deserves his food.’ To make the preaching of the gospel completely free is altogether different from accepting any gifts which meet your necessary expenses. The NEB version of Paul’s instructions to Timothy takes this command of the Lord one interesting step further: ‘Elders who do well as leaders should be reckoned worthy of a double stipend, in particular those who labour at preaching and teaching. For Scripture says, “A threshing ox shall not be muzzled”; and besides, “the workman earns his pay”.’

vi. *A timeless challenge*

With these five arguments Paul spells out an extremely powerful case for claiming all his personal rights, not merely as a Christian, but as an apostle. The Corinthians expected an impressive apostle to be very firm on his rights. Paul makes a completely contradictory case, and in so doing builds up an approach to the ministry of the gospel which is a timeless challenge to everyone called to share in the gospel. We will take each statement in sequence.

9:12, 15. *Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right.... But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing this to secure any such provision.* We might almost call this Paul’s password. He simply is not concerned about rights: he has deliberately chosen to forgo each and every one of them. He had the inner freedom to do so, which few Christians actually achieve. By thus freely ignoring his rights, he was actually celebrating his freedom. And if, by any chance, the Corinthians were beginning to think he was surreptitiously slipping in a request for some material provision of his daily needs, they could forget that as well (15). Paul’s emotional involvement in his ministry might well be a matter for evaluation; his integrity was completely above board.

9:12. *We endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.* Paul’s whole autobiography would endorse that statement. He was passionately gripped by Jesus Christ. He would do literally anything to ensure that ‘in everything he might be preeminent’. His whole attitude to Christian ministry was to ‘endure’ rather than to ‘enjoy’ his daily calling.

The overwhelming impression is of a man so utterly dedicated to the gospel, that he was constantly worrying about this drawback and that hindrance. Barrett puts it powerfully: ‘The gospel, which turned upon the love and self-sacrifice of Jesus, could not fitly be presented by preachers who insisted on their rights, delighted in the exercise of authority, and made what profit they could out of the work of evangelism.’ The word translated *obstacle* (*enkopēn*) is ‘a graphic and somewhat unusual word (only here in the New Testament). It means literally “a cutting into”, and was used of breaking up a road to prevent the enemy’s advance. Paul had avoided doing anything which might prevent a clear road for the gospel advance.’

The fact that Paul writes of enduring anything to prevent such irresponsibility also speaks of his great love for those outside Christ (*cf.* 9:19–23). The word for *endure* is one of the eloquent verbs he uses of true *agapē*-love. This kind of love ‘endures all things’, and it is salutary to hear the heart of an evangelist expressing itself in this way. We have only to read the lists of Paul’s sufferings in the Corinthian correspondence to appreciate something of what it cost him personally to ensure that the gospel-road was free of obstacles. A man who is ready to endure anything for the gospel is not interested in his rights.

9:15–18. *I would rather die than have any one deprive me of my ground for boasting.... What then is my reward? Just this: that in my preaching I may make the gospel free of charge, not making full use of my right in the gospel.* If Paul had any rights left in his apostolic heart, it was the right to make the gospel free of charge—and that was so close to his heart that he regarded it as his chief cause of pride. We know, from other parts of the Corinthian correspondence, that Paul’s boasting was a major source of inner conflict. He was driven to it by the unique pressures of the Corinthian situation. Barrett seems to be right in noting here (9:15) the beginning of the Pauline paradox of



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‘glorying in weakness.... Not only will Paul glory in circumstances that must have meant hunger and weariness; he will glory in a situation which can have brought him little but mockery and insult’.

Paul’s stance on boasting was that its only proper target is the Lord himself. He was certainly not proud of preaching the gospel: how could he be proud of doing something which he was inwardly and irresistibly compelled to do? If he had been compelled, for whatever reason, to stop preaching the gospel, he would simply have been consumed with intolerable frustration. Paul had been arrested by Jesus and therefore he had no option: *necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!* (16).

Because the Corinthians had become so obsessed with their rights, they found it almost impossible to believe that Paul could be inwardly driven purely by his love for Jesus Christ and his passion for the gospel. They would have reckoned it the ultimate disaster if they had had all their supposed rights stripped from them. For Paul, on the other hand, it would have been the ultimate catastrophe if he had been compelled to stop preaching the gospel. The penultimate catastrophe would have been if he had been prevented from doing so ‘free of charge’.

Paul posits the theoretical situation where he is spending his time preaching the gospel, but with his heart and soul actually elsewhere: *if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission* (17) or NEB, ‘I am simply discharging a trust.’ That is the lowest approach Paul could envisage towards preaching the gospel. He was so thrilled with the amazing privilege of proclaiming such a gospel, that he could not really empathize with those who saw it simply as a job to be done. At the same time he recognized that, at its most humdrum and prosaic, he was simply a man entrusted with a commission, a steward in trust with the resources of the Lord (17, *oikonomian*). A steward (an *oikonomos*) has no rights and no rewards, only responsibilities: and that is precisely the major thrust of Paul’s *apologia* (3) in this chapter. He did have rights, apostolic rights, rights as founder of the church at Corinth, which were unique and overriding. But he was utterly overwhelmed with the privilege of being an evangelist, and he repudiated as abhorrent the very idea that a man can do God any service, favour or kindness.

Paul’s whole attitude is paralleled closely by the instructions of Jesus himself: ‘Will any one of you, who has a servant ploughing or keeping sheep, say to him when he has come in from the field, “Come at once and sit down at table”? Will he not rather say to him, “Prepare supper for me, and gird yourself and serve me, till I eat and drink; and afterward you shall eat and drink”? Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, “We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.”’

3. Choosing slavery to all (9:19–23)

The rest of chapter 9 spells out Paul’s position, both in terms of his personal relationship to all sorts and conditions of men (19–23), and in terms of his own personal self-discipline (24–27). In both he provides a stimulating incentive to single-minded discipleship as a free man in Christ. He was completely free (*free from all men*, 19), but he did not intend to allow that freedom to provide him with an excuse for the indulgence even of an odd personal whim or two. Why? *I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings* (23). As Barrett comments: ‘The gospel has been entrusted to him, but it has not been put under his control.’²⁹ Every encounter, every personal habit, was now overtly under the control of Jesus Christ as Lord, because the gospel dominated his whole life. He was living his daily life *sub specie aeternitatis* (i.e. in the light of eternity), and that meant evangelism with integrity, relationships with adaptability, and personal holiness with single-mindedness.

Paul wanted, like his master, to lay down his life. He had learnt that ‘happiness lies more in giving than in receiving’. In verses 19–23 he gives a few examples of what it meant for him, a wealthy, educated, religious Jew, to make himself *a slave to all*. He had sacrificed matters of racial identity, religious sensitivity and conscience. He had done that with one goal: *that I might win the more* (19).

The word for *win* (*kerdainō*) comes five times in this paragraph. Then the nuance is changed by moving from ‘winning’ people to ‘saving’ them (22). The word *sōzō* (= save) states what *kerdainō* (= win) can only imply: that what is at stake is not simply the failure or success of human persuasion, but man’s eternal destiny. This is subtly implicit in the contrast between *that I might win the more* (19) and *that I might save some* (22). Paul did not thereby exclude any legitimate ‘means’ from efforts to win people, but he was at least tacitly acknowledging that the most enlightened, far-reaching, imaginative and ‘mass-production’ methods will not save anyone.

His fundamental philosophy was to discover the methods which combined the greatest integrity with the greatest impact—some might say ‘success’; cf. verse 19, *I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more*.



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There is a gold-mine of evangelistic methodology in that single sentence, particularly when we remember the way that Jesus himself modelled the servant/slave way of life: ‘Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.’ Martin Luther summed up this truth as follows: ‘A Christian man is a most free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian man is a most dutiful servant of all, subject to all.’

Taking a closer look at Paul’s slave-likeness, we see that (for example) he was ready to forgo the determinative power of his Judaism (20), if that would open a door for the gospel. He was concerned for the desires, the inclinations, the sensitivities of his hearers. ‘His Judaism was no longer of his very being, but a guise he could adopt or discard at will.’ There were occasions, notably in the circumcision of Timothy³³ and in discharging a Nazirite vow in the temple of Jerusalem, when he was quite ready to go through with actions which in Christ were unnecessary—and, by contrast, he refused to bow to pressure from Judaizers who wanted Titus to be circumcised.³⁵ Bruce comments, ‘If Paul felt no longer any necessity to comply with Jewish regulations and ceremonies as matters of divine obligation, he did not go to the other extreme and regard these things as forbidden to a Christian; henceforth they ranked as morally and religiously indifferent things, to be observed or not as occasion might indicate.’³⁶

A matter of minor importance may, nevertheless, have had some more direct bearing on Paul’s remarks here. We read that, on the eve of his departure from the Corinthian hinterland at the port of Cenchreae, ‘he cut his hair, for he had a vow’. Corinthians being Corinthians, that particular action could have had some kind of long-lasting impact on the libertine/legalist controversy.

The most radical implication of Paul’s words, however, was in the area of racialism: *To the Jews I became as a Jew*. It may be difficult to appreciate the profound freedom Christ brings to individuals and families who have, for years, generations or even centuries, been gripped by racial prejudice. It is an indescribable liberty to learn to relate to people as human beings. Paul had discovered freedom from racial pride and prejudice in Christ. He is, nevertheless, prepared to forgo the fruits even of that freedom *in order to win Jews*. In similar, but different, racial contexts today many Christians are walking that costly path in order to win racialists to Christ.

Because the next two examples (*i.e.* being under the law and being outside the law) of becoming *all things to all men* are so riddled with exegetical complexity, it is better to refer to competent scholarship, rather than work through the whole range of possibilities. Barrett³⁸ and Bruce³⁹ are reliable guides. The nub of the matter seems to be this: Paul had been a slave to religious ceremony and ritual in the Jewish law. This consisted of 613 written precepts in the Pentateuch, together (probably) with their oral amplification (called by Jesus ‘the tradition of the elders’). These were accepted as the divinely appointed way to life, but had been discovered by Paul to be an instrument of spiritual death. But in certain—unusual and infrequent—circumstances Paul was actually prepared to come again under the law, in order to avoid starting off a relationship on the wrong foot and thus to win such people to Christ. Equally, he was prepared to ignore all religious obligations, in order to win those totally beyond the pale of religious establishment and orthodoxy.⁴¹

In both approaches Paul would have run the risk of—and actually succeeded in—offending Christians. Such people, notably at Corinth but certainly not confined to Corinth, would have been concerned less with winning unbelievers to Christ as Lord than with keeping spotless the purity of the fellowship. Once again, the cliques at Corinth needed to stop worrying about this right and that right, or this reward and that reward, and to take with full seriousness their own responsibility for obeying the commission of the risen Lord to preach the gospel and make disciples.

Of course, there were dangers in Paul’s own methods of evangelism. Even in this short paragraph he has to make two key disclaimers, in order to pre-empt any accusation of his being a heretic. For example, the libertine element at Corinth would have been appalled to hear the apostle of freedom say that he was prepared to become *as one under the law* (20), even for evangelistic purposes. He therefore has to stress that he is himself *not under the law*. Likewise, the legalists would almost have had apoplexy to hear Paul talk of being *one outside the law* (21): and so he had to cover his tracks with the claim, *not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ* (21). It all seems a rather sad commentary on the truth of 8:1, ‘“Knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up.’ One would have thought that Paul’s own integrity and whole-heartedness, quite apart from his godly wisdom, would have made him above suspicion, even in Corinth.

Racial identity and religious sensitivity have been two major issues in Paul’s statement of true freedom in Christ; the third is the whole matter of conscience, which brings us back to the overall discussion on food offered to idols. The ‘strong’ and the ‘weak’ were the two groups which mattered in chapter 8; here Paul says, *To the weak I become*



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weak, that I might win the weak (22). This would seem to be a wider application, especially in the context of evangelistic opportunities, of his foundation-principle in 8:9, ‘Only take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.’ He was a ‘strong’ person with an informed and robust conscience, quite prepared to exercise his freedom in appropriate circumstances and equally prepared to curtail that freedom if required. It is worth recalling that, before he came to know freedom in Christ, Paul had been completely harassed by a guilty conscience, especially in the matter of covetousness. Now, he was clean and free to respond to the Holy Spirit.

Paul clearly exercised the most imaginative and sensitive adaptability in his relationships with unbelievers. He did it all *for the sake of the gospel*, so that he might share its power and reality as far and wide as possible. Paul was the most versatile of men, never locked into any single way of operating and always listening to God’s ideas in each new situation: *I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some* (22)—a veritable spiritual chameleon. Paul’s versatility in seeking to win men of all backgrounds to Christ challenges us to cross the culture-gap between the Christian sub-culture of cosy meetings and holy talk and the pagan culture of our local community. The task of identification with and incarnation into our contemporary paganism, of all kinds, is one of the biggest tasks confronting the church.

4. Running to win (9:24–27)

Paul sensed that the Corinthians had become spiritually flabby. They had been wanting the rewards without the hard work. They had been more concerned for pleasant surroundings than for proper training conditions. He had a ready metaphor at hand. Corinth was the centre of the Isthmian Games, which took place every two years. The streets of the city and the hillsides of the Acrocorinth would have been full of athletes in training for these prestigious events. It was self-evident that *every athlete exercises self-control in all things*, and ‘self-control’ is part of the fruit of the Spirit. If such self-discipline was crucial to gain a ‘crown’ made of pine-wood, then let us all run this Christian race with total dedication: ‘run to win’ (24) is Paul’s watchword.

He was not suggesting that we can miss out on the prize, because ‘the crown of righteousness’ awaits ‘all who have loved his appearing’—*i.e.* all whose goal in life is to know Christ and who are pressing forward for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ. In the contests in the athletic stadium at Corinth, only one person received the actual prize. In the Christian race, rewards are not additional to the gospel, but integral to it: but running does not automatically assure winning. Both perseverance and self-discipline are needed.

It is important to avoid the danger of drawing a wrong conclusion from Paul’s words here, *i.e.* that you can put all your energies into running the Christian race and end up *disqualified* (*adokimos*, 27). If this is what Paul thought might happen to him, what hope is there for anyone? The whole teaching of the New Testament makes it plain that such a verdict is impossible. At this point Barrett is dangerously wrong: he says, ‘Paul clearly envisages the possibility that, notwithstanding his work as a preacher, he may himself fall from grace and be rejected.... His conversion, his baptism, his call to apostleship, his service in the gospel, do not guarantee his eternal salvation.’⁴⁶ Indeed, they do not guarantee anything: only the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross can provide such a guarantee, and that is why Paul began his main theological exposition in this letter on that theme. Morris is more accurate when he writes: ‘Paul’s fear was not that he might lose his salvation, but that he might lose his crown through failing to satisfy his Lord (*cf.* 3:15).’

There is a particularly close word-link between 9:27 and 3:13 which makes the meaning of Paul’s teaching unambiguous. The context in 3:11–15 is the way any Christian, but particularly those involved in church-building, will have to face extremely thorough examination about the quality of his work for the Lord. This will be ‘tested’ by fire (*dokimasei*), to a degree which will expose the materials used in building on the foundation, the only foundation which can be laid, Jesus Christ himself. The root word from which both *dokimazei* (3:13) and *adokimos* (9:27) are taken appears in 2 Corinthians 13:5–7, where it occurs five times in a context where the validity of Paul’s own apostleship is being queried.

[MY NOTE: A MAN CAN WALK AWAY FROM THEIR SALVATION, REJECT IT.]

A man in Christ cannot lose his salvation, but he can find that his service for Christ has been followed through with his own resources and for his own glory. That is supremely what Paul feared.



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In verses 26 and 27 Paul is warning the Corinthians (and himself) of the need not to *run aimlessly*. He then switches from running to boxing and emphasizes the need to pommel his body and to subdue it. He did not see his body as evil, but he recognized that our bodies can be ‘presented’ either to sin ‘as instruments of wickedness’, or to God ‘as instruments of righteousness’.⁵⁰

Paul writes that he subdues his body, literally ‘I lead my body around as a slave’ (*doulagōgō*). He had spent his life preaching the good news of Jesus to others, using every bodily faculty at his disposal and getting not a few bruises and pains in the process. He, for one, was not going to miss out on all the rewards inherent in the gospel and only just be saved by the skin of his teeth. Paul had no intention of failing the test on that day, a day not of judgment on sin but of scrutiny of service. Just as competitors at the Isthmian Games could take no short cuts to physical fitness, so there are no easy options or routes of self-indulgence when we are serious about spiritual freedom. ‘Just as you once yielded your members to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now yield your members to righteousness for sanctification.’⁵² Forget your rights, Corinthians. Follow hard after that imperishable reward. Fulfill daily your responsibilities to yourselves, to one another and to the Lord himself.⁴

24 Once again Paul uses οὐκ οἴδατε, *do you not know, are you not aware*, as a rhetorical question which provokes the addressees to notice afresh what they know perfectly well if they take note or reflect. Although ἐν σταδίῳ may be translated **in a stadium** (more regularly) or *in a race*, it alludes to the **stadium** in which the pan-hellenic Isthmian games were held. The **stadium** would include not only foot races (οἱ ἐν σταδίῳ τρέχοντες ... τρέχουσιν) but also athletic contests of other kinds (e.g., boxing). Murphy-O’Connor discusses the Isthmian games in detail, concluding: “Paul could not have been unaware of the Isthmian games, and was probably in Corinth when they took place; they were celebrated in the spring of AD 49 and 51. Athletic metaphors were a commonplace in the popular philosophy of the period ... but it can hardly be coincidence that Paul’s first sustained development of this theme occurs in a letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 9:24–27).”

The Isthmian Games were one of the four great pan-hellenic festivals, ranking second only to the Olympic Games and above those of Delphi and Nemea. The prestige of the Games was enhanced by a tradition which went back to the sixth century BC, and they took place every two years, up to 146 BC at Corinth (when the Romans laid Corinth waste). Although for more than a century the Games were held at Sicyon, some six miles to the northwest, after the resettlement of 44 BC the influence of Corinth upon the Games steadily increased until it recovered their administration during the first decade of the first century. The inscriptions made available under the editorship of J. H. Kent provide evidence of financial sponsorship of the Games, including the renovation of buildings and the provision of banquets “for all the inhabitants of the colony” by a Corinthian patron. Both Murphy-O’Connor and Broneer call attention, in the other direction, to the substantial revenue that accrued to the Corinthian tradespeople and entrepreneurs from the huge crowds who stayed in the city and area for the duration of the games every alternate spring. Broneer discusses the archaeological remains of the site at Isthmia, which still offer fascinating details for the modern writer (e.g., the special system of starting the race (the device called *balbides*), the patronage in honor of Poseidon, and implications for a large commercial income for Corinthian businessmen.

The fame of the Isthmian Games is well attested in Greek literature and philosophy. Plutarch discusses the plant material used for the crown or garland at the games. An account of this biennial celebration and orations is found in Aelius Aristides, *Ovations* 46.20–31, in the third quarter of the second century AD. H. Funke cites the Cynic diatribe traditionally ascribed to Dio of Prusa but in Funke’s view to be attributed to Antisthenes as shedding light on Paul’s use of the imagery drawn from the Games.²⁵² The number and types of contest were increased in the era of Tiberius (AD 14–37), and this makes problematic Conzelmann’s claim that the reference here to only **one** runner gaining a prize is both moralistic and “out of place.” Only a misunderstanding of the function of analogy, or a confusion between analogy and allegory, could suggest that the notion of **one ... prize** is problematic in terms of *theology*. Papatomas cites a wealth of material from papyri and inscriptions concerning the contemporary background of Paul’s metaphor of the athletic contest, the winning of the crown (στέφανος) or prize (τὸ βραβεῖον), and related data and themes.

Pfitzner and Gale discuss more carefully in what specific respect the analogy reflected by οὕτως τρέχετε ... applies directly. Pfitzner rightly insists that most of the details of the image of v. 24 are to “*set the stage for the*

⁴ Prior, D. (1985). [The message of 1 Corinthians: life in the local church](#) (pp. 150–164). InterVarsity Press.



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theme of ἐγκράτεια, which follows. All the endeavors of the athlete are in vain if he has not trained his body and abstained from all that may in any way harm his physical condition” (his italics). Gale similarly insists: “It is clearly apparent that Paul does not intend the picture to be applied in all respects. Even the fact that is explicitly mentioned, that ‘only one receives the prize,’ can have no relevance here, for the reward or prize ... is not thought by him [Paul] to be given only to ‘one.’”²⁵⁶ Even the intensity of effort demanded of the athlete to **make the prize yours** (ἵνα καταλάβητε) belongs to the stage setting of the picture: an athlete goes through anything, both effort and abstinence, to win, because he or she has an eye on the ultimate goal.

Can the Corinthians, then, not exercise due ἐγκράτεια, **self-control** or *abstinence*, when what is at stake is not a garland made from vegetation, or even the acclaim of the crowd, but “the brother or sister for whom Christ died” (8:11)? This verse does not imply a theology of “Christian struggle,” other than struggle for self-mastery to forego indulgence of “rights.” We must not confuse the content (*Sachhälfte*) with the imagery (*Bildhälfte*). Hence, although οὕτως strictly means only *thus, so, or in this way* (adverbial form of οὕτως), we have translated it **with this approach** to avoid an understanding of οὕτως which Paul does not wish to convey. Even Origen was so troubled about the possible theological force of the pictorial imagery that he resorted to explaining **it is only one ... who receives the prize** on the ground that **one** denotes the single entity of the church as a corporate whole. However, the posthistory of the text moves beyond Paul’s horizon as the patristic era develops, for from the second to the fourth centuries the “athletic contest” or “struggle” comes to be perceived increasingly as “the holy athletes” who “stood alone and naked” as martyrs for the faith. This is not what Paul has in view in 9:24–27. As Eusebius witnesses, the particular resonance here is striving for the “crown” of martyrdom. However, Basil the Great uses the “crown” imagery (v. 25) to return to the Pauline point about *renunciation, self-discipline, and self-control*.

25 Many English VSS translate ὁ ἀγωνιζόμενος as *athlete* (NRSV, NJB) as against AV/KJV, *man that striveth for the mastery*. The meaning of the deponent verb ἀγωνίζομαι, however, stands somewhere between these two nuances. As BAGD assert, it denotes (i) literally or figuratively *engaging in a contest*, or (ii), in the context of weaponry, wrestling or boxing, *fighting or struggling*, as well as (iii) a more general notion of *exerting oneself*. The major specialist study on the term by Pfitzner, which has not yet been surpassed in judicious research into the background and exegesis, traces the background of the word in competitive contexts of rivalry and sports as a metaphor in moral philosophy in Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, Cynic philosophy, the mystery religions, Philo, Josephus, and the Pseudepigrapha.²⁶⁴ Pfitzner rejects the earlier research which seeks to argue for Paul’s use of ἀγών and ἀγωνίζομαι as denoting “the Christian’s moral task.” Such a view rests on ignoring the eschatological and soteriological framework within which Paul uses the term.²⁶⁶ E. Stauffer, e.g., pays too much attention to the patristic posthistory of the text, which relates the issue more often to martyrdom. A. Ehrhardt also appeals to a second-century Orphic writing for a sense which is foreign to Paul. Paul’s meaning is more closely anticipated in Aristotle’s moral philosophy. Aristotle uses the *analogy* of the trained runner or wrestler who avoids immoderate excess; this serves to establish Aristotle’s well-known moral philosophy of “the mean” (τὸ μέσον). Moderation, not struggle, is the “point” of the allusion: ὑπερβολή (excess) is to be avoided.

The popularity of the athletic metaphor as a tool in moral discourse flourishes in Epictetus, Seneca, Plutarch, and Marcus Aurelius. Epictetus, a near contemporary of Paul, offers a close parallel to Paul’s contrast between the relative futility of athletic success by comparison with moral character. In Seneca (also contemporary to Paul) the form in which the “struggle” is perceived is that of restraint from indulgence and becoming victim to one’s passions (i.e., attaining ἀπαρξία). Seneca compares the self-discipline of the present with the “greater good” of the final goal (*summum bonum*). Seneca’s emphasis in his use of athletic imagery remains always on the “greater good,” not upon competition or competitive struggle. Moreover, this is precisely the emphasis found in Paul’s third near-contemporary, Philo. As Pfitzner observes, it “becomes part of Philo’s stock vocabulary in picturing the *self-control and renunciation, practice, toil ... in the Agon for virtue*” (my italics). Allusions in Philo are too numerous to mention.²⁷⁵

All of this contributes to the main point that **everyone who enters as a combatant exercises self-control** (ἐγκρατεύεται) **in everything** (πάντα, accusative of respect). As Pfitzner notes, “πάντα ἐγκρατεύεται in v. 25 directly takes up the catchword sounded in vv. 12b, 19 and 22b–23 and provides an illustration of the Apostle’s principal [sic]: *everything* for the sake of the Gospel—including the right use of his liberty in the renunciation of his rights” (his italics and spelling).

The stage has been well and truly set for the subsidiary point, which is more than part of the image or *Bildhälfte*, namely, that the athlete gives up **everything to win a crown** (στέφανον) **that fades** (φθαρτόν). There is strong



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evidence that at the Isthmian Games the **crown** or *garland* given to the winner was made first from plastered pine leaves, although perhaps later from “celery.” Paul uses the cognate noun ἐν φθορᾷ in 1 Cor 15:42 (cf. also 15:53) to describe the mode of being or σῶμα which decays, in contrast to resurrection ἐν ἀφθαρσίᾳ. The terms φθορά and φθαρτός are themselves cognates of the verb φθείρω, *to destroy, to corrupt* (in the LXX used to translate Heb. כָּבַל (*ch-b-l*), *emptiness, nothing*, and thus φθαρτός vividly denotes **that which fades and disintegrates**, describing how pine leaves suffer decay and destruction. The alpha privative describes the crown **which will never fade away**. As we noted above, Basil picks up this contrast to make Paul’s point in later patristic thought (see under v. 24). The ἡμεῖς δέ occupies an emphatic position of contrast with ἐκεῖνοι μὲν, and hence we translate **athletes, however ...; but we in our case**. Paul stresses the qualitative differences between the two situations in which people are called to stake **everything**, and invites his readers to draw their own inferences from the comparison.

The tradition of a **crown** of victory stemming from the Greek city-states should be distinguished from a **crown** of royalty in the tradition of monarchies and the kingship of Israel and the kingdom of God or Christ. The widespread NT use of the **crown** for believers (e.g., 1 Pet 5:4; Jas 1:12; 2 Tim 4:8; Rev 2:10) is more likely to signify the **crown** of victory than of that of royalty, although sometimes sharing in the reign of Christ is in view. The four allusions just cited are to *a crown of righteousness*, *a crown of glory* or *a crown of life*, which reflect the contrast in 1 Cor 9:25 between a fading and an enduring crown of victory. The notion of *casting crowns before God* (Rev 4:10) occurs in Eusebius’s description of the victory of the martyr who (as in Revelation) wins victory by preferring to die than to renounce the Lord (cited above). The contrast between the transitory crown of the athlete and the lasting crown of mature selfhood is paralleled not only in 1 Pet 5:4, but, as we have noted, in Seneca and Epictetus.

26 ἐγὼ τοίνυν οὕτως τρέχω moves from principle or third-person example to Paul himself, and the Greek construction and use of pronouns and connectives have the force of **I, for my part, therefore, am so running ...** with an emphatic use of ἐγὼ and οὕτως enhanced by τοίνυν, *at any rate, for my part*. Weiss argues that to run with (or without) a clear goal (τρέχειν [οὐκ] ἀδήλως) is likely to be already a technical term. The Vulgate *non in incertum* reflects the meaning of ἀδήλως as the adverbial form of the adjective which means *indistinct*, i.e., *uncertainly* in the sense of having *an indistinct or unclear goal*; not as if to say that a person is unsure what the goal is. Today we might say: I play *with my eye on the ball*, or with *my eye clearly on the target*. If we transpose this imagery from ball games or archery to running, we propose the reading **an eye clearly on the goal**. If this clarity and force of translation is not to be achieved at the price of losing Paul’s *double negative* (οὐκ ἀδήλως), we must render **as one not distracted from keeping an eye clearly on the goal**. Collins renders the word *without hesitation*, alluding only to 14:8 for possible support, but Schrage retains the notion of having the *goal* in front of one’s eyes.

It is difficult to know whether ἀέρα δέρων means *shadow boxing* or flinging punches in a genuine fight which find no target. Pfitzner and Schmidt find examples of both uses. Although the second meaning underlines the fruitlessness of the exercise, it is more likely that Paul wants to expose “the strong” at Corinth who parade γνῶσις rather than ἀγάπη as all too ready “to go through the motions” of religious profession and routine without real engagement with the daily life-or-death issues arising from love for the other and the need to discipline and to constrain their own indulgences and freedoms. To lay primary stress on the first with a nuance suggesting the second is perhaps best achieved by **one who shadowboxes into empty air**.⁵

Job is a fireball book. It is a staggeringly honest book. It is a book that knows what people actually say and think— not just what they say publicly in church. It knows what people say behind closed doors and in whispers, and it knows what we say in our tears. It is not merely an academic book. If we listen to it carefully, it will touch us, trouble us, and unsettle us at a deep level.

What Kind of Church Should We Want?

But as well as asking what kind of world we live in, the book of Job will force us to ask what kind of church we belong to. What is the greatest threat to Christian churches today? That question was asked to an Any Questions panel at the Proclamation Trust’s Cornhill Training Course in London where I work. It is a good question, although answers

⁵ Thiselton, A. C. (2000). [The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text](#) (pp. 710–715). W.B. Eerdmans.



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are bound to be impressionistic. But here's a suggestion: in most of the world churches are liable to be swamped by the so-called prosperity gospel, and in the richer parts of the world churches struggle to guard the gospel against metamorphosing into what we might call the therapeutic gospel. These two closely-related pseudo-gospels threaten to displace the authentic Christian and Biblical gospel.

The prosperity gospel, in its crudest form, is the message that God wants you to be rich, and if you trust him and ask him, he *will* make you rich. One of the largest Christian occasions in Britain is the annual International Gathering of Champions, run by Pastor Matthew Ashimolowo. Preachers tell the congregation how God wants them to be rich and then richer and richer. The American preacher T. D. Jakes has an estimated personal fortune of one hundred million dollars. Such fortunes are regarded as evidence of God's favor.

The first time I visited Nigeria I was astonished at the myriad of ramshackle signs alongside the roadside advertising little independent churches. Most of them seemed to be teaching the prosperity gospel, with names like The Winners Chapel, Divine Call Bible Church (its slogan was "Excellence and Power"), or The Redeemed Evangelical Mission POWER WORD (how to speak a word that gets you power and influence). Come to Jesus and become a winner in life—that seemed to be the message. In our contrasuggestible English way, my traveling companion wanted to start a Losers Chapel, and I suggested an Apostolic Scum of the Earth Church, neither of which would be a marketing man's dream, but each of which would have been closer to the New Testament.

We visited the Ecumenical Centre, the large cathedral-like building at the heart of Abuja, the capital city. This is the flagship Christian building in the country (mirrored by an equally large central mosque not far away). When we were there, the building was being used by a prosperity gospel denomination, headed by self-styled Archbishop Sam Amaga. The bookstall consisted entirely of books by him. Here is a selection of the titles: *Cultivating a Winning Habit* (with the subtitle "Sure Guarantee for a Top Life"), *Created for the Top, Don't Die at the Bottom*, and *Power Pillars for Uncommon Success*.

A Ghanaian student at Cornhill told me that some weddings in his country replace the traditional wording of the wedding vows with the words, "For better, for best, for richer, for richest" because they cannot countenance the possibility that there may, for a Christian couple, be anything "worse" or "poorer."

So that is the prosperity gospel. If I am poor (financially and materially poor) and I come to Jesus, Jesus will make me rich. If I am sick, and I pray to Jesus, Jesus will make me well. If I want a wife or a husband, and I ask Jesus for one, he will give me a wife or husband. If a couple wants children and call out to Jesus, Jesus will give them children. And so on. This, according to the prosperity gospel, is what he has promised.

But what if, as in some parts of the world, I already am rich? I may not think of myself as particularly rich, but I have running water, I do not worry about having enough food, I have a roof over my head and adequate clothing. I may well have much more than these, but these alone suffice to make me very rich in world terms. Perhaps I am also healthy, happily married, and have children. What happens to the prosperity gospel when I already enjoy prosperity? It metamorphoses into the therapeutic gospel. In its simplest form, this false gospel says that if I feel empty and I come to Jesus, Jesus will fill me. The promise of objective goods (money, wife, husband, children) metamorphoses into the claiming of subjective benefits. I feel depressed, and Jesus promises to lift my spirits. I feel aimless, and Jesus commits himself to giving me purpose in life. I feel empty inside, and Jesus will fill me.

This chimes perfectly with prosperous twenty-first-century society. While writing this, I had a survey from our gas supplier asking for customer feedback after a repair job. The survey began with the words, "We want to know how we left you feeling." That is very contemporary. Not "We want to know whether we made your gas heating *work*, whether we did it promptly and efficiently" and so on (objective criteria), but "We want to know how we left you *feeling*" (the subjective focus). Did we help you feel good?

The therapeutic gospel is the gospel of self-fulfillment. It makes me, already healthy and wealthy, feel good.

The book of Job addresses in a deep and unsettling way both the pseudo-gospel of prosperity and the pseudo-gospel of feeling good.⁶

Is 'Name It Claim It' Teaching Biblical?

The "name it and claim it" or "prosperity gospel" is not biblical and is in many ways antithetical to the true gospel message and the clear teaching of Scripture. While there are many different versions of the name it and claim it

⁶ Ash, C. (2014). *Job: The Wisdom of the Cross* (R. K. Hughes, Ed.; pp. 19–21). Crossway.



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philosophy preached today, they all have similar characteristics. At its best, this teaching comes from the misinterpretation and misunderstanding of some Scriptures and, at its worst, it is a completely heretical teaching that has the characteristics of a cult.

The roots of the Word of Faith movement and the name it and claim it message have more in common with new age metaphysics [MY NOTE: AND BAAL WORSHIP] than with biblical Christianity. **However, instead of us creating our reality with our thoughts, as new age proponents advise, name it and claim it teachers tell us that we can use the “power of faith” to create our own reality or get what we want.**

In essence faith is redefined from trusting in a holy and sovereign God despite our circumstances to a way of controlling God to give us what we want.

Faith becomes a force whereby we can get what we want rather than an abiding trust in God even during times of trials and suffering.

There are many areas where name it and claim it departs from biblical Christianity. The teaching really exalts man and his “faith” above God. In fact many of the more extreme Word of Faith teachers teach that man was created on terms of equality with God and that man is the same class of being that He is Himself. This dangerous and heretical teaching denies the very basic tenets of biblical Christianity which is why the extreme proponents of the name it and claim it teaching must be considered to be cultic and not truly Christian.

Both the metaphysical cults and the name it and claim it teaching distort the truth and embrace the false teaching that our thoughts control reality. Whether it is the power of positive thinking or the prosperity gospel, the premise is the same—what you think or believe will happen is ultimately what controls what *will* happen. If you think negative thoughts or are lacking in faith, you will suffer or not get what you want. But on the other hand if you think positive thoughts or just have “enough faith,” then you can have health, wealth and happiness now. This false teaching appeals to one of man’s most basic instincts, which is one reason why it is hugely popular.

While the prosperity gospel and the idea of controlling one’s future with his thoughts or faith is appealing to sinful man, **it is insulting to a sovereign God who has revealed Himself in Scripture. Instead of recognizing the absolute sovereign power of God as revealed in the Bible, the name it and claim it adherents embrace a false god who cannot operate apart from their faith.** They present a false view of God by teaching that He wants to bless you with health, wealth and happiness but cannot do so unless YOU have enough faith. Thereby God is no longer in control but man is. Of course this is completely antithetical to what Scripture teaches. God does not depend upon man’s “faith” to act. Throughout Scripture we see God blessing who He chooses to bless and healing who He chooses to heal.

Another problem with the name it and claim it teaching is that it fails to recognize that Jesus Himself is the ultimate treasure worth sacrificing everything for (Matthew 13:44) and instead sees Jesus as little more than a way of getting what we want right now. Jesus’ message is that a Christian is called to “... deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. 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” (Matthew 16:24–26). Contrast that to the message of the prosperity gospel. Rather than being a message of self-denial, the prosperity gospel is one of self-satisfaction. Its goal is not becoming more Christ-like through sacrifice but having what we want here and now, clearly contradicting the words of our Savior.

The Bible teaches that “all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12), but the name and claim it message is that any suffering we undergo is simply the



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result of a lack of faith. The prosperity gospel is completely focused on us getting the things the world has to offer, but 1 John 2:15 tells us we should not “love the world or the things in the world” and, in fact, those with a fondness for the things of the world become enemies of God (James 4:4). The message of the prosperity gospel simply cannot be any more opposite of what the Bible really teaches.

In his book *Your Best Life Now*, prosperity teacher Joel Osteen says that the key to a more rewarding life, a better home, a stronger marriage and a better job is found in a “simple yet profound process to change the way you think about your life and help you accomplish what is truly important.” How different that is from the biblical truth that this life now is nothing compared to the life to come. **The message of the prosperity gospel is focused around the “treasures” or good things we want and can have now**, while Jesus said, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19–21).

Jesus did not come to give us health, wealth and happiness now. He came to save us from our sins so that we can have an eternity of bliss with Him. Following Christ is not a ticket to all the material things men desire in this life but a ticket to eternal life. Our desire should not be to have our best life now but should be that of the Apostle Paul who had learned to be content “in whatever state I am” (Philippians 4:11).⁷

CHAPTER 32

Money Is Evil

1 Timothy 6:10

The Legendary Teaching on 1 Timothy 6:10

We live in a society obsessed with money and material possessions. Idolatry for money is not new, but society has taken it to new heights. The apostle Paul, being aware of the danger of money, told Timothy that “money is ... evil” (1 Tim 6:10). Jesus himself said you cannot serve God and money (Matt 6:24). Money is put in contrast to God because God is holy and money is evil. So we need to avoid this danger at all costs as Christians, or we will suffer the perils associated with it.

Introduction: A Balanced View on Money

Evidence that this misquotation of Paul made its way into American culture can be seen in the song by the Andrews Sisters called “Money Is the Root of All Evil.” Christians need a balanced view of money. When thinking about money, we should avoid two polar extremes. The first extreme is that those who are truly spiritual and live holy lives will be rich. This teaching has manifested itself in a bold way today through the “prosperity gospel.” Teachers of the prosperity gospel believe God wants all of his children to be rich and healthy. Any problems with money or health can be traced to sin. This is horrible heresy. Nowhere does Scripture say God wants all his children to be rich. The Bible even has warnings to the rich (see 1 Tim 6:17–19). The second extreme is that those who are truly spiritual and live holy lives will be poor, selling all they have and giving it to the poor. Christian ascetics are an example of this. There may not be many around today, but throughout Christian history some believers have refused to accumulate any worldly possessions.

Between these two extremes is the Bible. God allows some Christians to be rich, some to be middle class, and some to be poor. The concern of Scripture is not whether you are rich, middle class, or poor but your attitude toward

⁷ Got Questions Ministries. (2002–2013). [Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered](#). Logos Bible Software.



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what you have. Scripture is also concerned with the stewardship of your money and possessions. I read a sermon by a British preacher from the late 1800s who said good Christian stewardship entails doing the following: take out a piece of paper and make a list of everything you own and then think about how you can use that for the glory of God and serving other people. He gave examples like using a sewing machine to make clothes for the poor. Good stewardship is viewing your possessions at the disposal of God and not just for your own selfish desires and pleasures. The rich, middle class, and poor can all have a bad attitude about wealth, viewing their money and possessions selfishly. People from any economic status can have a sinful love of money that leads to their spiritual destruction. Within this theological context of money and possessions, we encounter 1 Timothy 6:10.

What Does 1 Timothy 6:10 Actually Say?

When someone quotes or paraphrases Scripture and it sounds different than what you remember, make sure you look it up in the Bible. I had a friend say to me that money is evil: “Even Paul said so!”

I replied, “You should probably look up that verse before citing it again.” He had no idea where the verse was! The next day we were talking, and he said, “You’re right, it doesn’t say ‘money is evil’; it says ‘the love of money is evil.’ ”

I said, “Are you sure?” He said he was, but he was *surely* wrong.

The difference between “money is evil” and “the love of money is evil” is significant. When people say, “The love of money is evil,” they are communicating that loving money is a sin in and of itself. They are declaring that we should not place our affections in something like money. Instead, our affections should be directed toward God. Those are good thoughts. But that is still not what the verse says. Paul did not say the love of money is evil, but, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains” (1 Timothy 6:10). The text says that the love of money is a *root* of different kinds of evils.

The word *root* can refer to the part of a plant that is underground. However, this use is a figurative extension of the literal meaning. It refers to the reason or cause of something. When people have a love of money, it can be a reason or cause for sin. The basic idea is that many kinds of evils can be motivated by a love for money.¹⁷⁵

The word *for* begins the verse because Paul is explaining in verse 10 something he said in verse 9: “But those who want to be rich fall into temptation, a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge people into ruin and destruction.” He doesn’t say, “Those who are rich are sinful,” or “Those who are rich will be destroyed.” Instead Paul focuses on the *desire* to be rich. Being rich is not condemned. Paul is talking about the desire for riches because it leads to many different kinds of temptations: the desire to be rich leads to the desire for money. That is the connection between these two verses.

If you desire to be rich, that is going to lead to a love for money, and that is going to motivate all kinds of evils in your life. What kind of danger lies ahead for those who love money? Paul says some have abandoned Christianity because of their love for money. The main point in this passage is that many kinds of sins will be connected to someone who loves money.

Application

The love for money can be connected to different sins. One of the main things that causes discord in marriages is money. For example, couples may have difficulty communicating about money, or they might have different priorities in spending money. Money conflict is one of the biggest destroyers of marriage. If one partner loves money more than he or she loves the other partner, that is going to create a huge problem. A love for money will drive injustice in our society. Prostitution and sex trafficking in the United States is (at least partly) driven by a love for money. One of the reasons the entertainment industry puts so much sexual immorality in movies is because sex sells tickets. The love of money is driving immorality in movies.

The main issue to focus on when it comes to the love of money is the sin of stinginess. I was listening to a radio show and a financial advisor was taking phone calls. A man, about fifty years old, called up and said, “I have been following the principles you teach for years. Before you were on the radio, I was doing these things. And my wife and I are very frugal. We put away just about everything we can.”

The radio host asked him, “How much money do you make a year?”

He said, “About fifty thousand dollars.”

“Well how much money does your wife make?”

He said, “She stays at home.” The radio host then asked how much they had saved. The man said, “About 1.5 million dollars.” The radio host thought that was great. But the man said: “The problem is that we are having a hard



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time giving. We don't want to be generous with the church or with our children or with anyone. We have this mentality of hoarding money, and now we can't be generous with it."

The radio host ignored his concern and said, "But you saved 1.5 million! Great job!" This man was in the midst of confessing his love for money, and he was being praised for it! His love for money was preventing him from obeying Scripture's commands on giving, and he was confessing this on the radio. So much more money could be given to missions if we were released from the love of money and were more generous in giving. We cannot truly say that we love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind, but have a love for money that usurps God himself.

Be warned that just because someone has a lot of money doesn't mean they love it. Some people have a knack for making money easily. Some people are rich because they love money, and some are poor because they love money. Don't look at people's financial situation and judge them. That reflects more on your heart and probably your desire for riches than anything else.

Avoid the love for money. Stay away from that temptation. One of the best ways to flee from the temptation to love money is to be generous in giving, which can be freeing as it fights back against the love for money and a desire to have security through money.

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See page 92.

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www.johnharmstrong.com/?p=6195.

Some interesting and helpful thoughts on this verse.⁸

(i) Baalism was a prosperity religion

Those who worshipped Baal in Zephaniah's day hoped that they would store up riches and prosperity for themselves. They believed that Baal could make the land more fertile and productive, and that if they pleased and stimulated the Baal its plants, animals and people would be fruitful and multiply. So many of the people worshipped the god of fertility and prosperity rather than the one true creator God who could supply all their needs.

Today, we have our modern Baals associated with prosperity. 'Baal was another name for the gross national product; and wherever people see bank balances, prosperity or sound economy, productivity and mounting exports, as the essence of their security, Baal is still worshipped.'

In the Gospels Jesus frequently warns us about materialism and putting our trust in wealth. On one occasion he said, 'Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.' He then went on to tell the story of the rich fool who, having made a great success of his farming, said to himself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.' But God said to him: "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?"' Then Jesus added, 'This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich towards God.'

The temptation to dabble in prosperity religion comes in other more subtle ways too for Christians in the twenty-first century. Few of us take seriously enough the challenge in the old slogan, 'Live simply that others may simply live.' Indeed some Christians are taught to believe in a 'prosperity gospel' that claims that Christians may become rich and prosperous if only they have enough faith to claim and believe the promises of God. An example of this was found in the teachings and practices of one well-known evangelist, whose workers put out an envelope on everyone's seat in the meeting hall with the words, 'The more you give, the richer the Lord will make you.' One young couple I know were so deceived and then disillusioned by this prosperity teaching which their local minister taught in their church that they no longer belong to any church. That is not to excuse their action but it illustrates the harm to which the 'prosperity gospel' can lead.

⁸ Croteau, D. A. (2015). [Urban Legends of the New Testament: 40 Common Misconceptions](#) (pp. 189–193). B&H.



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Jesus teaches us in the Sermon on the Mount that we are not to be anxious about food, drink or the clothes we need to wear; rather, we are to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. Then, as he puts it, ‘all these things will be given to you as well’. But clearly Jesus is not saying that if we put him first he will inevitably make us rich materially! Surely he is saying that if we put him first in our lives, he will meet our needs.

The apostle Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians may appear to support a prosperity gospel. He certainly teaches that generous giving brings generous spiritual blessings. He reminds us that as we give, God meets our every need and provides for every good work materially and spiritually. God does this in full measure. The apostle assures us: ‘God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, *having all that you need*, you will abound in every good work.’ But the phrase ‘having all that you need’ is a translation of the Greek word, *autarkeia*, which in Greek thought described the man ‘who has taught himself to be content with very little and never to want anything’. So they are necessities not luxuries that God provides. Furthermore, Paul argues that as we share with others what God has entrusted to us, the resources of God’s people are multiplied⁶⁴ and a spiritual harvest follows. Many spiritual blessings flow from generous sacrificial giving. But this is very far from the prosperity gospel teaching that ‘the more you give (materially) the richer the Lord will make you’. In the providence of God that may sometimes be true; but God does not promise great material wealth to the generous giver, but great spiritual riches, and the supplying of material needs.

Baalism in Zephaniah’s time was a prosperity religion; and there was a remnant in Judah and Jerusalem (4) who worshipped the god of prosperity and fertility rather than the one true God who could meet all their needs. We need to learn from their mistakes and guard ourselves from materialism and from the false emphases of the so-called prosperity gospel. God is against false and corrupt religion and the disobedience of those who practise it. He is also against those who teach people to be materialistic and those who espouse a false gospel. For Zephaniah the outcome was certain. Baalism would not triumph, any more than any false religion will. *I will cut off from this place every remnant of Baal, the names of the pagan and the idolatrous priests.* To ‘cut off’ includes the idea of ‘erasing from the memory’. When God has completed his work of judgment, nothing will be left of false religion, and nothing will be remembered. False religion has no eternal significance.⁹

SEED FAITH:

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

2 CHRONICLES 25:9 God Has Unlimited Resources, and the Good News Is That He Makes Them Available to You, SEED FAITH. In man’s economy, the law of supply and demand regulates the price paid for goods and services. In times of oversupply, the prices go down; in times of shortage, the prices rise. Man’s economy fluctuates with the times and the seasons.

God’s economy, however, has no shortages. God’s supply always equals our need. He does not want any of His people to have any lack, but rather, to “increase more and more” (see **1 Thess. 4:10-12**). [MY NOTE ?????? THIS DOES NOT SEEM THE INTENT OF THIS SCRIPTURE...]

Do you think that if you give something to God, you will have less? Not according to God’s law of Seed Faith. When you give, you have just put yourself into the position for increase!

We can never outgive God. No matter what we give to Him, He will multiply it back to us in an amount greater than we gave! Our ability to receive the harvest, however, is not automatic. Expecting to receive, not from the person to whom we give, but from

⁹ Bridger, G. (2010). *The Message of Obadiah, Nahum and Zephaniah: The Kindness and Severity of God* (A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.; pp. 199–201). Inter-Varsity Press.



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God our Source, is an act of our faith also. As a farmboy I learned that to plant means to do something, and receiving the harvest likewise requires doing something! Both are acts of our faith.¹⁰

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

2 SAMUEL 24:24 Give God Your Best—Then Expect His Best, SEED FAITH. David had sinned; and, as a result, a plague came on the people. To atone for this sin, the Lord told King David to build an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah and offer a burnt offering so that the plague might be stayed. Araunah tried to give David the land, the oxen, and other items to sacrifice. But David insisted on paying Araunah, saying that he could not present to God an offering that cost him nothing.

The very heart of Seed Faith is that unless you experience some sacrifice, you have not truly given. Unless your giving costs you something—something that represents a portion of your very life—then it is not a living gift and will not yield a good harvest. Our giving to the Lord must bear these three qualities.

First, it should be our best. When we give God our best, we are in a position to expect His best back into our lives.

Second, we should give to God first. The very first thought in our minds after we have received something should be how we can give a portion of our harvest to the work of the Lord.

Third, our giving should be generous, freely from our heart and without expecting anything back from the one to whom we give. As Jesus said to His disciples, “Freely you have received, freely give” (Matt. 10:8).¹¹

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

MARK 11:22

²² So Jesus answered and said to them, “Have faith in God.²³ For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. ²⁴ Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.

Your Faith in God Is the Key to Your Receiving, SEED FAITH. Believing can take opposite forms. It can be faith or it can be doubt. When you believe that God exists and that He loves you and wants to meet your needs, then your believing creates faith in your heart. On the other hand, doubt is just as real. The reverse of faith, doubt tells you that God does not exist or that He is unloving and uncaring about your needs. Doubt gives rise to

¹⁰ Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). [Spirit filled life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., 2 Ch 25:1). Thomas Nelson.

¹¹ Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). [Spirit filled life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., 2 Sa 24:18). Thomas Nelson.



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fear, which brings torment, not peace. Fear actually keeps you from receiving the good things God desires to send your way. Capture this truth: Doubt, and do without; with faith believe, and receive. I have said for years, “Expect a miracle!”

Expectancy opens your life to God and puts you in a position to receive salvation, joy, health, financial supply, or peace of mind—everything good your heart longs for, and more! 12

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

Galatians 6:7

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

God Has a Due Season for All of the Seeds You Plant—Good Seeds As Well As Bad Seeds, SEED FAITH. God has a timetable for every seed we plant. His timetable is not always our timetable. Sometimes the “due season” means a quick return. Sometimes it means a process or a slow return that may take years—even a lifetime. But we can count on three things. First, God will cause a harvest to come from our seeds. Second, God is never early or late—He is always right on time with our best interests at heart. Third, our harvest will have the same nature as our seeds sown: good seeds bring good harvests, bad seeds bring bad harvests.

What are we to do during the growing time of our seeds? 1) Refuse to become discouraged. 2) Determine to keep our faith alive and active. 3) Give and keep on giving; love and keep on loving. Know this—His harvest is guaranteed. Continue in an attitude of expectancy.

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

Galatians 6:7 The Seedtime of Our Lifetime, WORLD EVANGELISM. The law of sowing and reaping is at the heart of world evangelism. In John 4, Jesus declares a divine Now to the time for our laboring for the harvest of souls (see John 4:35-38). Here, we are reminded that our lifetime is our “seedtime,” and our life’s harvest will yield multiplied times the fruit of the seed sown—if we sow wisely. This truth calls us to cast off reserve and to give God the finest “soil” of our lives in which He may beget a rich harvest. Hos. 8:7 presents the same principle, contrasting the power of “sowing” for evil rather than for God. The truth is amplified by this comparison. If sowing to evil (the flesh) may reap a whirlwind, how much more may righteous sowing (to the Spirit) make room for God’s almightiness! He came as a rushing, mighty wind at Pentecost. Might He not work in

¹² Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). [Spirit filled life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., Mk 11:20). Thomas Nelson.



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holy hurricane power if He can find us sowing to the Spirit? A God-possessed life guarantees partnership with God in worldwide increase.¹³

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

Galatians 3:10 Your Giving Proves God, Opens the Windows of Heaven to You, and Causes the Devourer to Be Rebuked, SEED FAITH. In this passage of Scripture, God actually invites people to try (prove) Him—to verify His trustworthiness with their giving. He says that by withheld giving we rob Him of the privilege of pouring out great and overflowing blessings. He calls for renewed giving with this promise. First, there will be “food” or resources for God’s work (“in My house”). Second, He says those who give will be placed in position to receive great, overflowing blessings. You can experience the windows of heaven actually opening with blessings you will not be able to “receive” or contain! Third, God says that He will “rebuke the devourer” for your sakes. He will cause every blessing that has your name written on it to be directed to you, and Satan himself cannot stop it. Do not be afraid to prove God with your giving; He is God and He will stand the test every time.¹⁴

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

Genesis 8:22 God Established the Principle of the Seed and the Law of Seedtime and Harvest, SEED FAITH. Noah’s first acts after the Flood were to build an altar and sacrifice to the Lord. God was pleased and made promises to the human family through the faith of Noah. He also instituted the Law of Seedtime and Harvest: “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest . . . shall not cease” (v. 22).

When God created the first living thing, He gave it the ability to grow and multiply. How? Through the Seed. Your life began by the seed principle. Every act of your life since your birth has operated by the seed principle—springing from good seeds or bad seeds you have sown—whether or not you were consciously aware of your seed-planting. The principle continues today. To overcome life’s problems, reach your potential in life, see your life become fruitful, multiplied, replenished (that is, in health, finance, spiritual renewal, family, or your entire being), determine to follow God’s law of seedtime and harvest. Sow the seed of His promise in the soil of your need. 15

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

Malachi 3:10 Your Giving Proves God, Opens the Windows of Heaven to You, and Causes the Devourer to Be Rebuked, SEED FAITH. In this passage of Scripture, God actually invites people to try (prove) Him—to verify His trustworthiness with their giving. He says that by withheld giving we rob Him of the privilege of pouring out great

¹³ Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). [Spirit filled life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., Ga 6:6). Thomas Nelson.

¹⁴ Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). [Spirit filled life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., Mal 3:8). Thomas Nelson.

¹⁵ Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). [Spirit filled life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., Ge 8:21). Thomas Nelson.



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and overflowing blessings. He calls for renewed giving with this promise. First, there will be “food” or resources for God’s work (“in My house”). Second, He says those who give will be placed in position to receive great, overflowing blessings. You can experience the windows of heaven actually opening with blessings you will not be able to “receive” or contain! Third, God says that He will “rebuke the devourer” for your sakes. He will cause every blessing that has your name written on it to be directed to you, and Satan himself cannot stop it. Do not be afraid to prove God with your giving; He is God and He will stand the test every time.¹⁶

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

2 Corinthians 9:8 Give What You Have in Your Hand to Give, SEED FAITH. Note especially these three things as you study this passage: First, God is the One who makes all grace abound toward you and provides you sufficiency in all things. All things beneficial for our lives come from God’s hands. Second, we are given sufficiency—even “bounty” so that we might do good works. We are blessed in order to be a blessing to others! (see Gen. 12:2). The word “sufficiency” means “self-satisfaction,” “contentedness,” or “competence”—earmarks of the believer whose life is truly blessed by these characteristics as God increases him (also see Gen. 12:2). And third, the God who gave you seed in the first place is the One who meets your basic needs, multiplies your seeds sown into an abundance you can share with others, and increases you spiritually with love, joy, peace, and all of the other fruit of the Holy Spirit flowing freely in your life (“the fruits of your righteousness”).

How great is our God! We have no lack in Him—only potential!¹⁷

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

1 Kings 17:8 You Must Give God an Opportunity, SEED FAITH. This episode teaches us to invite God to work by His unlimited power within our limited circumstances and resources. Two important principles for our giving are illustrated by this passage of Scripture.

First, we must give something out of our need. That is the kind of giving that involves our faith. This woman had a need for herself and her family, but she gave to sustain the ministry and life of God’s prophet, Elijah. Then God multiplied her giving back to her.

Second, this woman gave first. Her giving activated the miracle supply of God flowing back into her life. For perhaps as long as three years God multiplied her seed sown.

Your giving causes something to happen according to God’s eternal principles of seedtime and harvest. There is an old saying that bears repeating: “Without God, you cannot; without you, God will not.” God has already given from His side. Now we must

¹⁶ Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). [Spirit filled life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., Mal 3:8). Thomas Nelson.

¹⁷ Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). [Spirit filled life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., 2 Co 9:7). Thomas Nelson.



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step out in our giving to Him. Doing so will release His flow of provision on our Earth-side of things. Sow! Give Him something to multiply!¹⁸

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

James 5:15 You Can Always Give a Seed of Prayer . . . A Seed of Forgiveness . . . A Seed of Love and Joy, SEED FAITH. Do you ever feel you have absolutely nothing to give to God? Well, you can always plant a seed of faith-believing, love-motivated prayer in another person’s life!

What does this type of prayer do? It saves the sick. Now “save” and “heal” are virtually interchangeable words in the Greek language; and “sickness” may broadly refer to any weakness or inability, disease or sin—anything that is “wrong” in life. In other words, the prayer of faith works to do good in whatever area life has gone bad.

And when people pray this kind of prayer, they are healed as they pray! Jesus also said that we are forgiven as we forgive (see Matt. 6:14, 15). We experience love as we give love away. We are blessed as we bless others. God gives to us as we give to others.

We can always plant a faith-believing prayer in the life of another person. Do it with love . . . with joy . . . with a spirit of forgiveness . . . and expect God to multiply that seed in your own life! ¹⁹

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

Luke 5:1 God Multiplies Your Seed to More Than Meet Your Greatest Need, SEED FAITH. Jesus taught a great lesson about seed-sowing and the importance of sowing in good soil (see Mark 4:1-20). Then, as if to illustrate His point, He told this group of discouraged and tired fishermen to launch out with their faith for a miracle catch.

These men had just planted their boat as a seed into the ministry of Jesus. They had given Him their greatest possession as a platform from which to preach the gospel. They had served the greatest need Jesus had at that moment, and here Jesus multiplied that gift into the means that met the greatest need they had at that moment in their lives. As commercial fishermen, they had a need for fish in order to make a living. They also had a need to see God working in their lives—to see both that Jesus was who He claimed to be and that their faith was operating effectively. Jesus met both of those needs!

When you give something to God, He will give it back in a way that is even better—plus He will be in it with all His grace and power! ²⁰

¹⁸ Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). [Spirit filled life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., 1 Ki 17:3). Thomas Nelson.

¹⁹ Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). [Spirit filled life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., Jas 5:14). Thomas Nelson.

²⁰ Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). [Spirit filled life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., Lk 4:42). Thomas Nelson.



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KINGDOM DYNAMICS

John 3:16 God Gave to Us First. He Is Our Role Model for Giving and Receiving, SEED FAITH. Do you find it difficult to believe that you should expect to receive back from your giving? Read again this most famous verse in all the Bible and notice these things: 1) God so loved. God's motivation for giving was love. Ours must be, too. 2) God gave. God's love was turned into an act of giving. 3) God gave His only begotten Son. He gave His very best! So must we also give our best. 4) God gave for a specific reason—to get man back from Satan. God's deepest desire is to have man restored to Himself. And to get that need met, He gave. What is your need? Your giving—as an act of your deepest love and strongest faith—is the key to your having that need met. 5) God gave sacrificially. Our salvation cost Jesus His life (see John 12:24). It also costs us—full repentance and the giving of our lives to God. 6) God's plan works! Souls are saved because God gave His best, gave first, and gave expecting to receive! God Himself is our role model for giving . . . and receiving!²¹

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

Mark 4:1 Be Wise As to Where You Plant Your Seeds of Faith. God Multiplies Seed Sown in Good Soil, SEED FAITH. We are not only responsible to plant seeds of our faith through actual acts of giving as to the Lord; we are also responsible for selecting the soil in which we plant. It is the quality of the soil that determines the quantity of our harvest. Jesus clearly outlines how we should direct our giving.

First, we must take charge of our giving. We plant our seeds of faith. We do so with patience and diligence (see Luke 8:15).

Second, we must look for places where the Holy Spirit is at work. Look for places alive with the Word of God—where spiritual results are found; where miracles, signs, and wonders confirm the preaching of the Word. Plant your seeds of faith there!

Third, look for people whose ministries already bear fruit for the kingdom of God. Are souls being saved? Are the sick being healed? Are people being delivered? Plant there!

Our Savior Himself tells you what you can expect when you follow His principles for planting: a multiplied harvest! You can look for 30-, 60-, and 100-fold returns when seed is sown wisely.²²

²¹ Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). [Spirit filled life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., Jn 3:14). Thomas Nelson.

²² Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). [Spirit filled life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., Mk 3:31). Thomas Nelson.



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KINGDOM DYNAMICS

Exodus 15:26 God Is a Good God. He Desires Only His Best for You!, SEED FAITH. In promising His continuing, healing presence as our Covenant Healer, God places two great conditions before His people.

First, God asks us to heed Him. He wants us to listen for His voice, to have a hearing ear so we will hear Him. God has always spoken to His people and He will speak to you today, but you must cultivate an attitude of listening for His voice. He speaks in many ways: through His Word, through His anointed servants, and through direct revelation in your inner man (Eph. 1:17, 18). He is seeking a people who will listen for His voice and not try to run and hide from Him (see Gen. 3:8).

Second, God asks us to “do what is right in His sight.” He is seeking people who will not only hear His words, but will take them to heart and act on them—people who will obey His word and not be hearers only (see James 1:22-25).

God’s goodness is abundantly promised. It awaits those who “(sow) to the Spirit” (Gal. 6:7-9), hearing His voice and doing what He tells us to do.²³

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

John 10:10 God Desires Biblical Abundance for You, SEED FAITH. As you give your total self to God, God gives His total self to you. That is the supreme message of the Bible. Inherent in God’s “total self” of His own Person is true, Bible-based prosperity—the real possibility of health for your total being (body, mind, emotions, relationships), of your material needs being met. Above all, His prosperity brings eternal life. Stop to think about it. What else is there worth having?

Jesus said that He came to give life—not just ordinary existence, but life in fullness, abundance, and prosperity (3 John 2). On the other hand, the Enemy (Satan) comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. The line is clearly drawn. On one side is God with goodness, life, and “plenty” of all that is necessary for life (see Joel 2:26 and 2 Pet. 1:3), and on the other side is the Enemy of our souls, who comes to rob us of God’s blessings, to oppress our bodies through disease and accidents, and to destroy everything that we love and hold dear.

Your first step toward experiencing full biblical prosperity is to believe that it is God’s highest desire for you. The next step is to line up your highest desire with His.

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

²³ Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). [Spirit filled life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., Ex 15:25). Thomas Nelson.



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10:10 Abundant Life, GOD’S PROSPERITY. God’s covenant to us is a covenant for abundant life. From the very beginning of time, Scripture shows us that God wanted us to be happy and prosperous. In Gen., we are told that God made everything and declared it to be good. Then He gave this beautiful, plentiful Earth to Adam; Adam was given dominion over all of it (Gen. 1:28). God’s plan from the beginning was for man to be enriched and to have a prosperous, abundant life. Here Jesus declares His intention to recover and restore to man what was the Father’s intent and to break and block the Devil’s intent to hinder our receiving it.

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

10:10 Abundant Life, HUMAN WORTH. Christ came to Earth in defense of life. By His words and actions He opposed any thing, force, or person that might diminish it. Likewise, He calls us to do everything within our power to preserve and enhance the lives of those around us. In addition to evangelizing, we are to work to reduce poverty, disease, hunger, injustice, and ignorance.

Beyond His defense of life, however, Jesus also came to deliver from death and to introduce abundant living. By His death and resurrection, Christ has opened a new dimension of life for all mankind, that “all things become new” (2 Cor. 5:17).²⁴

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

Matthew 25:34 All of Our Giving Is to Be as to God Our Source, SEED FAITH. Whenever you and I give, or plant our seeds of faith, we are doing it for Jesus. The person we feed becomes as Jesus to us. The person we visit in prison or in the sickbed becomes as Jesus to us. How may we know our Lord? We know Him in doing His works and in doing them as much to Him as for Him. We know Him in putting our arms around those who are desperate or alone. He said that when we do this we are putting our arms around Him—Jesus Christ, our blessed Savior.

Although our giving is to take on very real and tangible forms as we reach out to people, as we give through individuals and churches and ministries to meet great needs around the world, the focus of our faith is to be on Jesus and Jesus alone. He is God—and He is our Source. He is the object of our worship and our love. He alone is worthy of our lives, and He alone can supply our needs.

We give to others, but let us keep our vision clear. We look past them, with our faith directed to God and offered as a service of love for Him. 25

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

²⁴ Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). [Spirit filled life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., Jn 10:7). Thomas Nelson.

²⁵ Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). [Spirit filled life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., Mt 25:31). Thomas Nelson.



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Matthew 17:19 God Has a Way for Getting Your Need Met, Your Problem Solved. That Way Is Rooted in Your Faith's Becoming a Seed, SEED FAITH. When you plant a seed, God changes the nature of that seed so that it becomes a plant; and the power of life surges in that tender young plant to such a great extent that even a mountain of earth cannot stop it from pushing upward!

Jesus says our faith in God is like a seed. When we put our faith into action, that is, when we release it to God, it takes on a totally new nature. It takes on the nature of a miracle in the making.

What is the mountain in your life? Loneliness, loss of a job, disease, a wounded relationship, trouble in your home? Something else? Be encouraged! Jesus shows the way to see that mountain removed!

First, God says that you have a measure of faith (Rom. 12:3). It is resident within you. Second, God says that this faith comes alive by "hearing . . . the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Third, God says that you can apply your faith to see your daily needs met. How? You do something as an act of your faith. You sow the mustard-seed smallness of your faith into an action of love (Matt. 17:20). Then, when your faith has been planted and is growing, speak to your mountain and watch God set about its removal.²⁶

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

Luke 6:38 God Expects You to Receive a Harvest from Your Giving. He Wants Us to Expect a Miracle Return!, SEED FAITH. Jesus opened up a whole new way of giving. He gave Himself totally to and for the needs of the people. We can no longer pay or sacrifice our way into God's mercy. Jesus Christ has paid our debt before God, and His Cross is a completed work in our eternal interest. Our giving, then, is no longer a debt that we owe, but a seed that we sow! The life and power source is from Him. Ours is simply to act on the power potential in that seed-life He has placed in us by His power and grace!

Notice that when Jesus said, "Give," He also said, "and it will be given to you." Giving and receiving belong together. Only when we give are we in a position to expect to reach out and receive a harvest. And Jesus said the harvest will be "good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over."

We give as to God, and we receive as from God; but we should remain sensitive at all times to the different ways in which God may deliver our harvest. I often say, "A miracle is either coming toward you or going past you all the time. Reach out and take it! Do not let it pass by!" (see Matt. 9:20-22). God's miracle for you may be coming as an idea, an opportunity, an invitation, or a previously unknown or unidentified association. Watch expectantly for the ways in which God may choose to deliver your miracle to you in His "due season" (which, for you, may be today).²⁷

²⁶ Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). [Spirit filled life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., Mt 17:12). Thomas Nelson.

²⁷ Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). [Spirit filled life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., Lk 6:37). Thomas Nelson.



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Mark 17

■ **19–20*** The narrative does not reach its goal until vv. 19–20* where the issue is the disciples' inability to cast out the demon. Does the disciples' question refer only to the story of Jesus back then? If so it would be difficult to understand why Matthew would have changed the Markan answer and replaced it with a reference to the disciples' little faith—an expression that for him is always directed at the church's concrete situation. At the beginning of the disciples discourse Jesus had given the twelve disciples the authority and the task to heal sick and to cast out demons (10:1*, 8*). We interpreted this commission as a real task that was fundamentally valid for the church.³⁷ From 7:22* we know that miracles continued to happen in the church, even in questionable ways. Thus we interpret the disciples' question against the background that in Matthew's charismatic community sometimes the experiences of healing did not happen.³⁸ The churches behind the Gospel of Mark probably had similar problems, as Mark 9:28–29* demonstrates. There, just as in James 5:13–16*, intensive prayer is decisive for the success of a healing.

The answer given by Matthew is more basic than the Markan answer. It consists of an answer from the evangelist himself and the traditional Jesus saying about mustard seed faith. His own answer is: Failure in healing is an expression of little faith. Little faith is, as in 6:30*, 8:26*, 14:31*, and 16:8*,³⁹ faith that has become discouraged and lacks trust in God's miraculous help. Thus Matthew does not think that healings and exorcisms are special experiences that sometimes happen and sometimes do not. He is much more "enthusiastic" and regards healings and exorcisms as experiences that are an essential part of faith. Where they are absent, faith has not lived up to its potential. "Little faith" *must* be overcome by actually laying claim to the power of Jesus. To his own answer Matthew adds the logion about the faith that can move mountains—a saying so important for him that he transmitted it twice (cf. 21:21*). It contrasts "little faith" with "faith like a mustard seed," obviously a faith that is also "little." At first glance the distinction is confusing. What is meant?

Often the interpreters were inclined to put forward their own understanding of faith under the signature of the vague "faith as a mustard seed." The point with the mustard seed is then not that it is small but that it has a strong, sharp taste. Or the issue is the "faith that ... is aware of its own ungodliness (Rom 4:5*)." ⁴² Or it is faith "that is based completely on God and that shares in his power." We should not overinterpret. In the traditional Jesus saying of Luke 17:6* the comparison of faith with a mustard seed serves to contrast what is incomprehensibly small, viz. faith, with what is incomprehensibly large, viz., what faith effects, that is, the uprooting of a sycamore tree with its giant roots. Thus the issue is not a special "mustard seed faith," but faith as such. In Matthew also it is related not to little faith but to moving a mountain. Here also we must beware of overinterpretations. While there are biblical statements that say that God in his saving future will level mountains (but not move them!) (Isa 40:3–5*, 49:11*, Zech 14:10*), "to uproot" or "tear out mountains" is a widespread Jewish hyperbole for "to do something impossible" that could be applied in quite different ways. Contrary to a popular interpretation, in my judgment the issue in the logion is not that faith will participate "in God's creative activity" or in the "miracle of eschatological renewal,"⁴⁵ but much more simply that seemingly impossible things are promised to faith. What things? There is no reason to think that even Jesus is not thinking also of miracles in this saying.

In v. 20* Matthew contrasts faith with little faith. To believe means to trust in Jesus that he "can do that" (9:28*) or that "nothing will be impossible for you." While for Matthew too



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all members of the church are “believers” (18:6*), faith comes into its own when the issue is miracles and extraordinary proofs and experiences. Venture, prayer, obedience on the one side and the unrestricted power of Jesus on the other side constitute faith. Faith means departure, prayer, venture, laying claim to the unrestricted power of Immanuel that is promised to the church (28:20*). And since, according to Matthew, this power is repeatedly available in concrete miracles that by no means are *only* symbolic, that means that the miracle in this text is not simply irrelevant and designed to introduce a teaching, even though Matthew so radically abbreviated it. Instead, it is a central question of faith for the evangelist that miraculous healings actually happen in the church.

Summary and History of Interpretation

It is here at the very latest that the *reality* question becomes a burning issue. Faith has never moved mountains! Nor does it normally heal epileptics and other sick people. It is amazing how almost two thousand years of interpreting a biblical saying have succeeded in ignoring this problem. The apostles would have had no convincing reason to move mountains is John Chrysostom’s opinion. Calvin thinks that the issue is to be “temperate” and to wish only “what the Lord promises.”⁴⁸ Again we encounter the familiar thesis that miracles were especially necessary at the beginning of the church’s history but not later. It is claimed that the “eccentricity” of the expression shows that the issue is not “grotesque” miracles like moving mountains, but “participating in God’s omnipotence” is “related to the concern of faith.”⁵⁰ A lovely, gloriously general formulation! But what is the concern of faith? According to Matthew it is obviously precisely healing the sick or other *extraordinary* claims on God’s power. According to him that is precisely the way faith is distinguished from little faith.

We are certainly justified in raising questions here. If complete faith were manifested only in the ability to perform miracles, it also would be true that “the more we grow in faith and trust, the more we (also) grow in this ability.” Or conversely: The less we have the ability to perform miracles, the more we must conclude that we are far from full faith and from God. What is *promised* to faith comes dangerously close here to a power that one possesses. Paul is more theologically advanced on this point when he consistently understands healings as *χαρίσματα*, that is, as gifts that a free God grants to the church, not to every believer. Not everyone who is unable to do miracles is of little faith. Matthew may think too enthusiastically. Still, his voice should be heard in our churches today which not only often understand charismatic experiences as (at best!) somewhat extreme additions to faith rather than its essence but that beyond that often have forgotten how to lay claim to God as a power for achieving things that appear impossible. Then faith changes nothing; it simply lets God of necessity become the authority that sanctions what is and gives people the strength to be satisfied with what is “possible”²⁸

FAITH, SEED, PRINCIPLES OF. Jesus is called “The Seed” (Gen. 3:15), the Word of God is designated as “Seed” (Luke 8:11; 1 Pet. 1:23), the growth of the believer is likened to a plant (John 15), and the evangelism of the world to a harvest (Matt. 13:30). This only begins the

²⁸ Luz, U. (2001). [Matthew: a commentary](#) (H. Koester, Ed.; pp. 408–410). Augsburg.



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imagery of “seed faith” in the Bible, a theme that is biblically developed in this study. It is altogether desirable to capture a firm grasp of this truth, the essence of which is that the little we have to bring to God is not a limit to faith’s possibilities. When we bring Him the smallest of our strength, faith resource, and ability, when it is placed in Him—sown like a seed—there is a guaranteed fruitfulness and harvest forthcoming. It is within the laws of God’s creation—both the natural and the spiritual realm—and worthy to be applied in practical living.

1. The Principle of the Seed; the Law of Seedtime and Harvest (Gen. 8:22). Noah’s first acts after the Flood were to build an altar and sacrifice to the Lord. God was pleased and made promises to the human family through the faith of Noah. He also instituted *the Law of Seedtime and Harvest*: “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest...shall not cease” (v. 22).

When God created the first living thing, He gave it the ability to grow and multiply. How? Through the *Seed*. Your life began by the seed principle. Every act of your life since your birth has operated by the seed principle—springing from good seeds or bad seeds you have sown—whether or not you were consciously aware of your seed-planting. The principle continues today. To overcome life’s problems, reach your potential in life, see your life become fruitful, multiplied, replenished (that is, in health, finance, spiritual renewal, family, or your entire being), determine to follow God’s law of seedtime and harvest. Sow the seed of His promise in the soil of your need.

2. Expecting God’s Best (2 Sam. 24:24). David had sinned; and, as a result, a plague came on the people. To atone for this sin, the Lord told King David to build an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah and offer a burnt offering so that the plague might be stayed. Araunah tried to give David the land, the oxen, and other items to sacrifice. But David insisted on paying Araunah, saying that he could not present to God an offering that cost him *nothing*.

The very heart of Seed Faith is that unless you experience some sacrifice, you have not truly *given*. Unless your giving costs you something—something that represents a portion of your very life—then it is not a living gift and will not yield a good harvest. Our giving to the Lord must bear these three qualities.

First, it should be our *best*. When we give God our best, we are in a position to expect His *best* back into our lives.

Second, we should give to God *first*. The very first thought in our minds after we have received something should be how we can give a portion of our harvest to the work of the Lord.

Third, our giving should be *generous*, freely from our heart and without expecting anything back from the one to whom we give. As Jesus said to His disciples, “Freely you have received, freely give” (Matt. 10:8).

3. God’s Desire for You (Ex. 15:26). In promising His continuing, healing presence as our Covenant Healer, God places two great conditions before His people.

First, God asks us to heed Him. He wants us to listen for His voice, to have a hearing ear so we will hear Him. God has always spoken to His people and He will speak to you today, but you must cultivate an attitude of listening for His voice. He speaks in many ways: through His Word, through His anointed servants, and through direct revelation in your inner man (Eph. 1:17-18). He is seeking a people who will *listen* for His voice and not try to run and hide from Him (see Gen. 3:8).



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Second, God asks us to “do what is right in His sight.” He is seeking people who will not only *hear* His words, but will take them to heart and *act* on them—people who will obey His word and not be hearers only (see James 1:22-25).

God’s goodness is abundantly promised. It awaits those who “[sow] to the Spirit” (Gal. 6:7-9), hearing His voice and doing what He tells us to do.

4. Giving God an Opportunity (1 Kin. 17:8-16). This episode teaches us to invite God to work by His unlimited power within our limited circumstances and resources. Two important principles for our giving are illustrated by this passage of Scripture.

First, we must give something out of our *need*. That is the kind of giving that involves our *faith*. This woman had a need for herself and her family, but she gave to sustain the ministry and life of God’s prophet, Elijah. Then God multiplied her giving back to her.

Second, this woman gave *first*. Her giving *activated* the miracle supply of God flowing back into her life. For perhaps as long as three years God multiplied her seed sown.

Your giving causes something to happen according to God’s eternal principles of seedtime and harvest. There is an old saying that bears repeating: “Without God, you cannot; without you, God will not.” God has already given from His side. Now we must step out in our giving to Him. Doing so will release His flow of provision on our earth-side of things. Sow! Give Him something to multiply!

5. God’s Unlimited Resources (2 Chr. 25:9). In man’s economy, the law of supply and demand regulates the price paid for goods and services. In times of oversupply, the prices go down; in times of shortage, the prices rise. Man’s economy fluctuates with the times and the seasons.

God’s economy, however, has no shortages. God’s supply always equals our need. He does not want any of His people to have any lack, but rather, to “increase more and more” (see 1 Thess. 4:10-12). Do you think that if you give something to God, you will have less? Not according to God’s law of Seed Faith. When you give, you have just put yourself into the position for increase!

We can never outgive God. No matter what we give to Him, He will multiply it back to us in an amount greater than we gave! Our ability to receive the harvest, however, is *not* automatic. Expecting to receive, not from the person to whom we give, but from God our Source, is an act of our faith also. As a farmboy I learned that to plant means to *do* something, and receiving the harvest likewise requires *doing* something! Both are *acts* of our faith.

6. God Has a Way (Matt. 17:19-20). When you plant a seed, God changes the nature of that seed so that it becomes a plant; and the power of life surges in that tender young plant to such a great extent that even a mountain of earth cannot stop it from pushing upward!

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God says that you can *apply* your faith to see your daily needs met. How? You *do* something as an act of your faith. You sow the mustard-seed smallness of your faith into an action of love (Matt. 17:20). Then, when your faith has been planted and is growing, *speak* to your mountain and watch God set about its removal.

7. Biblical Abundance (John 10:10). As you give your total self to God, God gives His total self to you. That is the supreme message of the Bible. Inherent in God’s “total self” of His own Person is true, Bible-based prosperity—the real possibility of health for your total being (body, mind, emotions, relationships), of your material needs being met. Above all, His prosperity brings eternal life. Stop to think about it. What else is there worth having?

Jesus said that He came to give life—not just ordinary existence, but life in fullness, abundance, and prosperity (3 John 2). On the other hand, the Enemy (Satan) comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. The line is clearly drawn. On one side is God with goodness, life, and “plenty” of all that is necessary for life (see Joel 2:26 and 2 Pet. 1:3), and on the other side is the Enemy of our souls, who comes to rob us of God’s blessings, to oppress our bodies through disease and accidents, and to destroy everything that we love and hold dear.

Your first step toward experiencing full biblical prosperity is to believe that it is God’s highest desire for you. The next step is to line up your highest desire with His.

8. Receiving a Harvest; Expecting a Miracle (Luke 6:38). Jesus opened up a whole new way of giving. He gave Himself totally to and for the needs of the people. We can no longer pay or sacrifice our way into God’s mercy. Jesus Christ has paid our debt before God, and His Cross is a completed work in our eternal interest. Our giving, then, is no longer a debt that we owe, but a seed that we sow! The life and power source is from Him. Ours is simply to act on the power potential in that seed-life He has placed in us by His power and grace!

Notice that when Jesus said, “Give,” He also said, “and it will be given to you.” Giving and receiving belong together. Only when we give are we in a position to expect to reach out and receive a harvest. And Jesus said the harvest will be “good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over.”

We give as to God, and we receive as from God; but we should remain sensitive at all times to the different ways in which God may deliver our harvest. I often say, “A miracle is either coming toward you or going past you all the time. Reach out and take it! Do not let it pass by!” (see Matt. 9:20-22). God’s miracle for you may be coming as an idea, an opportunity, an invitation, or a previously unknown or unidentified association. Watch expectantly for the ways in which God may choose to deliver your miracle to you in His “due season” (which, for you, may be *today*).

9. A Due Season for All Seeds (Gal. 6:7-9). God has a timetable for every seed we plant. His timetable is not always our timetable. Sometimes the “due season” means a quick return. Sometimes it means a process or a slow return that may take years—even a lifetime. But we can count on three things. First, God will cause a harvest to come from our seeds. Second, God is never early or late—He is always right on time with our best interests at heart. Third, our harvest will have the same nature as our seeds sown: good seeds bring good harvests, bad seeds bring bad harvests.



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What are we to do during the growing time of our seeds? (1) Refuse to become discouraged. (2) Determine to keep our faith alive and active. (3) Give and keep on giving; love and keep on loving. Know this—His harvest is guaranteed. Continue in an attitude of expectancy.

10. The Importance of Giving (Mal. 3:10-11). In this passage of Scripture, God actually invites people to *try* (prove) Him—to verify His trustworthiness with their giving. He says that by withheld giving we rob Him of the privilege of pouring out great and overflowing blessings. He calls for renewed giving with this promise. First, there will be “food” or resources for God’s work (“in My house”). Second, He says those who give will be placed in position to receive great, overflowing blessings. You can experience the windows of heaven actually opening with blessings you will not be able to “receive” or contain! Third, God says that He will “rebuke the devourer” *for your sakes*. He will cause every blessing that has your name written on it to be directed to you, and Satan himself cannot stop it. Do not be afraid to *prove* God with your giving; He is God and He will stand the test every time.

11. The Key to Receiving (Mark 11:22-24). Believing can take opposite forms. It can be faith or it can be doubt. When you believe that God exists and that He loves you and wants to meet your needs, then your believing creates faith in your heart.

On the other hand, doubt is just as real. The reverse of faith, doubt tells you that God does not exist or that He is unloving and uncaring about your needs. Doubt gives rise to fear, which brings torment, not peace. Fear actually keeps you from receiving the good things God desires to send your way. Capture this truth: Doubt, and do without; with faith believe, and receive. I have said for years, “Expect a miracle!”

Expectancy opens your life to God and puts you in a position to receive salvation, joy, health, financial supply, or peace of mind—everything good your heart longs for, and more!

12. Giving Back to Our Source (Matt. 25:34-40). Whenever you and I give, or plant our seeds of faith, we are doing it for Jesus. The person we feed becomes as Jesus to us. The person we visit in prison or in the sickbed becomes as Jesus to us. How may we know our Lord? We know Him in doing His works and in doing them as much to Him as for Him. We know Him in putting our arms around those who are desperate or alone. He said that when we do this we are putting our arms around Him—Jesus Christ, our blessed Savior.

Although our giving is to take on very real and tangible forms as we reach out to people, as we give through individuals and churches and ministries to meet great needs around the world, the focus of our faith is to be on Jesus and Jesus alone. He is God He is our Source. He is the object of our worship and our love. He alone is worthy of our lives, and He alone can supply our needs.

We give to others, but let us keep our vision clear. We look past them, with our faith directed to God and offered as a service of love for Him.

13. Selecting Good Soil for Sowing (Mark 4:1-20). We are not only responsible to plant seeds of our faith through actual acts of giving as to the Lord; we are also responsible for selecting the soil in which we plant. It is the quality of the soil that determines the quantity of our harvest. Jesus clearly outlines how we should direct our giving.



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First, we must take charge of our giving. We plant our seeds of faith. We do so with patience and diligence (see Luke 8:15).

Second, we must look for places where the Holy Spirit is at work. Look for places alive with the Word of God—where spiritual results are found; where miracles, signs, and wonders confirm the preaching of the Word. Plant your seeds of faith there!

Third, look for people whose ministries already bear fruit for the kingdom of God. Are souls being saved? Are the sick being healed? Are people being delivered? Plant there!

Our Savior Himself tells you what you can expect when you follow His principles for planting: a multiplied harvest! You can look for 30-, 60-, and 100-fold returns when seed is sown wisely.

14. **Multiplying Your Seed (Luke 5:1-11).** Jesus taught a great lesson about seed-sowing and the importance of sowing in good soil (see Mark 4:1-20). Then, as if to illustrate His point, He told this group of discouraged and tired fishermen to launch out with their faith for a miracle catch.

These men had just planted their boat as a seed into the ministry of Jesus. They had given Him their greatest possession as a platform from which to preach the gospel. They had served the greatest need Jesus had at that moment, and here Jesus multiplied that gift into the means that met the greatest need they had at that moment in their lives. As commercial fishermen, they had a need for fish in order to make a living. They also had a need to see God working in their lives—to see both that Jesus was who He claimed to be and that their faith was operating effectively. Jesus met both of those needs!

When you give something to God, He will give it back in a way that is even better—plus He will be in it with all His grace and power!

15. **Giving What's in Your Hand (2 Cor. 9:8-10).** Note especially these three things as you study this passage: First, God is the One who makes all grace abound toward you and provides you sufficiency in all things. All things beneficial for our lives come from God's hands. Second, we are given sufficiency—even "bounty" so that we might do good works. We are blessed in order to be a blessing to others! (see Gen. 12:2). The word "sufficiency" means "self-satisfaction," "contentedness," or "competence"—earmarks of the believer whose life is truly blessed by these characteristics as God increases him (also see Gen. 12:2). And third, the God who gave you seed in the first place is the One who meets your basic needs, multiplies your seeds sown into an abundance you can share with others, and increases you spiritually with love, joy, peace, and all of the other fruit of the Holy Spirit flowing freely in your life ("the fruits of your righteousness").

How great is our God! We have no lack in Him—only potential!

16. **A Seed of Prayer, Forgiveness, and Love and Joy (James 5:15-16).** Do you ever feel you have absolutely nothing to give to God? Well, you can always plant a seed of faith-believing, love-motivated prayer in another person's life!

What does this type of prayer do? It saves the sick. Now "save" and "heal" are virtually interchangeable words in the Greek language; and "sickness" may broadly refer to any weakness or inability, disease or sin—anything that is "wrong" in life. In other words, the prayer of faith works to do good in whatever area life has gone bad.



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And when people pray this kind of prayer, they are healed *as they pray!* Jesus also said that we are forgiven *as we forgive* (see Matt. 6:14-15). We experience love *as we give love away*. We are blessed *as we bless others*. God gives to us *as we give to others*.

We can always plant a faith-believing prayer in the life of another person. Do it with love...with joy...with a spirit of forgiveness...and expect God to multiply that seed in your own life!

17. God's Model for Giving and Receiving (John 3:16). Do you find it difficult to believe that you should expect to receive back from your giving? Read again this most famous verse in all the Bible and notice these things: (1) *God so loved*. God's motivation for giving was love. Ours must be, too. (2) *God gave*. God's love was turned into an act of giving. (3) *God gave His only begotten Son*. He gave His very best! So must we also give our best. (4) *God gave for a specific reason*—to get man back from Satan. God's deepest desire is to have man restored to Himself. And to get that need met, He gave. What is your need? Your giving—as an act of your deepest love and strongest faith—is the key to your having that need met. (5) *God gave sacrificially*. Our salvation cost Jesus His life (see John 12:24). It also costs us—full repentance and the giving of our lives to God. (6) *God's plan works!* Souls are saved because God gave His best, gave first, and gave expecting to receive! God Himself is our role model for giving...and receiving! O.R.²⁹

JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST (βῆμα τοῦ χριστοῦ, *bēma tou christou*). The seat for eschatological judgment, building on the concept of the judgment seat of Roman judges or tribunals. A specific phrase that appears only once in the New Testament (2 Cor 5:10).

Historical Origins

Citizens and subjects of the Roman Empire would have been familiar with the concept of a "judgment seat" in the first century. The judgment seat was the location from which municipal authorities welcomed visitors into cities, extended favor to righteous citizens making pleas for justice, and assessed punishments on social deviants (Myers, "Honor," 22).

²⁹ Hayford, J. W., Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1995). [Hayford's Bible handbook](#). Thomas Nelson Publishers.



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Biblical Relevance

The New Testament writers directly reference the concept of a judgment seat nine times. In Acts, the term refers to the historical judgment seat of Roman judges (Acts 12:21; 18:12, 16–17) or tribunals (Acts 25:6, 10, 17). In the Gospels, the term describes the seat of Pilate during the trial of Jesus (Matt 27:11; John 18:28–33). Perhaps the more important passages for understanding the judgment seat of Christ include the two references to an eschatological court scene, one governed by God (Rom 14:10), the other by Christ (2 Cor 5:10).

Interpretation

The “judgment seat of Christ” in 2 Cor 5 is traditionally interpreted as the judgment of those righteous in Christ (Guille, *Judgment Seat*, 8–9; Myers, “Honor,” 37–38; Sale-Harrison, *Judgment Seat*, 4–10; Harris, “2 Corinthians,” 349). It is neither the judgment of the nations (Matt 25:31–46) nor the great white throne (Rev 20:11–15). Rather than being viewed as a judicial bench, the judgment seat of Christ should be viewed as the “reward seat.” Such was customary in the Grecian games in Athens, in which those presiding over the games sat atop this “judgment seat”—not in a judicial fashion, but rather to evaluate an athlete’s performance and assess a proper reward (Sale-Harrison, *Judgment Seat*, 7–9).

The concept of a “reward seat” is not limited to the “judgment seat of Christ,” as it also applies to the “judgment seat of God” in Romans (Rom 14:10 ESV). In both of these contexts, Paul is addressing fellow believers and encouraging them regarding the honor they will receive from the messianic and/or divine judge sitting upon the judgment seat (Myers, “Honor,” 34).

In both contexts, Paul also encourages believers not to judge one another, for only God or Christ is to judge. The reward given is implicitly reliant on one’s actions in life, whether good or bad. In Romans, Paul writes that believers should give a full account of their lives to God, who will in turn evaluate each believer’s life to determine what reward shall be given (Rom 14:12). In 2 Corinthians, each believer will be rewarded based on “deeds in the body” (i.e., actions taken while alive, whether good or bad). Good deeds will receive a greater reward, and bad deeds will lessen the reward. Yet the judgment seat remains only for believers in Christ who have already been justified and found worthy to stand before a judge, having their lives inspected to determine their rewards (Sale-Harrison, *Judgment Seat*, 9–10).

Selected Resources for Further Study

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Reward. A Definition of Reward. The word “reward” has both a favorable and an unfavorable meaning in English. In its favorable sense, it is something given in return for a good thing done, a service rendered, or some merit earned. For example, in Matthew 5:11–12, Jesus says, “Blessed

³⁰ Garrett, J. K. (2016). [Judgment Seat of Christ](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.



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are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.” In its opposite sense, the word “reward” can refer to punishment for a wrong or wrongs committed, although it is rarely used this way in the Bible. In Revelation 22:12 the Greek word for “reward” is probably used with both favorable and unfavorable meanings in mind: “Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.” In this article, the word is limited to the more favorable meaning of recompense for good done rather than punishment for evil committed.

The Location of the Giving of Rewards. The rewards Christians will receive for faithful service to the Lord will be given out at the judgment seat of Christ or the *bēma* judgment. The Greek word *bēma* appears in 2 Corinthians 5:10 and Romans 14:10 and refers to the place where the works of believers will be evaluated by Christ for purposes of reward. In 2 Corinthians, a context in which Paul has stated several other incentives for faithful Christian service, Paul adds this additional encouragement: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” In Romans 14:10, where Paul is speaking about exercising love for fellow Christians, be they weak or strong in the faith, he again uses the *bēma* judgment as a motive for doing it, only here he calls it “God’s judgment seat.” “You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat (*bēma*).”

It is clear that this is not a judgment resulting in salvation or damnation. Nevertheless, it is an important judgment for it will determine what responsibilities Christians will have in the coming kingdom (Matt. 25:21). According to Paul, some will come through with very little to show for their Christian lives, saved as though “through the flames” (1 Cor. 3:15). What he means is that some Christians will be saved but with little, if anything, to show for their years on earth. Whether because of wrong motives or laziness or misplaced priorities, they will conclude their lives with very little of any eternal worth to show. While the whole salvation process is a gift (Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8–10), rewards are the result of human effort and are earned (1 Cor. 3:14).

Depending on one’s view of the temporal location of the rapture of the church, the *bēma* judgment will take place either in heaven, while the great tribulation is transpiring here on the earth, or on earth at the beginning of Christ’s reign after his second coming. In either case, it is preparatory to the Christians’ reigning together with Christ on earth following his return.

An Identification of the Rewards. The rewards to be given out for faithful service at the *bēma* judgment are dealt with in various ways.

Those spoken of in terms of “crowns” are nonmaterial, thus doing away with their being materialistic motives for divine service. **The “crowns”** that are biblically identified as being given on that day include: a **crowns** that will last forever for those who have kept their sinful nature in check (1 Cor. 9:25–27); a **crowns** of righteousness for those who have longed for Christ’s appearance (2 Tim. 4:8); a **crowns** of life for those who have endured testing successfully, even to the point of death (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10); a **crowns** of rejoicing for those who have seen souls saved (1 Thess. 2:19); and a **crowns** of glory for those who have faithfully served God’s people (1 Peter 5:4).



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In other places, the rewards are spoken of as **“treasures in heaven”** (Matt. 6:20), a share in Christ’s future role (Rev. 2:26–27), and additional responsibilities and words of praise (“Well done, good and faithful servant”; Matt. 25:21, 23; Luke 19:17, 19). It is worth noting again how intangible and immaterial these rewards are. Even the gift of eternal life is set forth as a prize to be gained. Eternal life is something to be laid hold of by the individual (1 Tim. 6:17–19).

While emphasizing the future rewards, it is also well to remember that there are **many good results that come to the faithful believer in this life, things that can be called “rewards.”** Jesus said that he had come that his own might have life and have it to the full (John 10:10). He also said that if his own would continue to seek first his Father’s kingdom and his righteousness, all the temporal things they needed would be given to them as well (Matt. 6:33).

The Standards for Reward. One clearly stated standard for rewards at the *bēma* judgment will be whether the works done by the Christian have been good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10). It is significant that Paul uses the Greek word “foolish” or “worthless” and not one of the Greek words for “evil.” His point is that there are some things that are good for the advancement of the kingdom and righteousness and others that are not, even though one would not call them evil. For example, some may spend a great deal of time and money on personal hobbies that have no eternal worth. They are not evil, unless undue amounts of time and money are spent on them; but they may not be of any eternal profit either. In that sense, they can be said to be foolish, although not sinful.

Another point to be stressed regarding standards is that rewards will not be given necessarily for successful service as the world so often evaluates it. **Paul notes that “it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful” (1 Cor. 4:2). Note that he does not say “successful”** as one might consider success here on earth. What is rewarded is not primarily the visible accomplishments of the individual, but the faithful labor expended (1 Cor. 15:58). On this basis, some who have been very faithful in a more private ministry may come in alongside of and even ahead of some others who have had more public ministries, but who have not been as faithful or as purely motivated. It is also significant to note that the five-talented and the two-talented servants (Matt. 25:21, 23) were given the same reward because both were equally faithful with what had been entrusted to them.

The Variation in Reward. Salvation and eternal life are the same for all Christians but the rewards given to each varies, dependent upon the faithful labor expended. It is clear from the parable of the talents in Matthew 25 that the lord of the servants expected more from the five-talented man than he did from the two-talented or the one-talented individuals. Note that the talents were dispensed according to personal ability to handle them (v. 15). The ones with lesser amounts had lesser responsibility. Paul says that at the judgment of the believer’s works, each will receive a reward according to his or her labor. Matthew 5:12 speaks of great reward in heaven and 2 John 8 speaks of a full reward, both references indicating that the rewards will not all be the same.

The Forfeiture of Reward. Several passages warn against the forfeiture or loss of reward. It is clear that this does not mean a repossession of the reward by the Lord, for the rewards being spoken of here have not yet been given. According to Paul, it is possible to “build” on the



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foundation, which is Christ, but to be building with “wood, hay or straw,” which cannot stand the test of fire; the builder will be saved but “only as one escaping through the flames” (1 Cor. 3:11–15). In other words, people can be busy with the Lord’s work and still receive no reward. They may be taking advantage of opportunities to labor for the Lord and yet not be engaged in endeavors that meet with God’s approval because they have the wrong motives. For example, if they seek the praise of others, they can have that praise but receive no reward from God later (Matt. 6:1–18). Along with this forfeiture of reward will go a severe sense of shame and remorse (1 John 2:28) and a possible divine reprimand for wasted living as a Christian (Matt. 25:26–28). It is to be underscored, however, that this loss of reward does not mean a loss of salvation.

The Motivation of Reward for Christian Service. It is true that the reward motive for Christian service is not the *highest* biblical motive but it *is* a biblical one. As the highest, we are told to do all we do for God’s glory (1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:23–24). We are to do all we can to be accepted by Christ, for the good of others, and out of gratitude and love for all God has done for us. Even the fear of the Lord that is going to fall on the unsaved is a legitimate incentive for service in seeing the lost saved (2 Cor. 5:11).

Down the line, but certainly in the line of biblical motivations for ministry, is the reward motive. Jesus, knowing our human nature, spoke much about the rewards to come for Christian labor for the Christian cause. It must also be remembered, however, that Jesus encouraged humble, unselfish service for God’s kingdom and his church, even without reward. He taught that, even if we could do everything commanded of us, we are still unprofitable servants since we have just done our duty (Luke 17:7–10). In Matthew 20:1–16, all the servants receive a denarius for a day’s work in the field, even though some had worked only a small fraction of the day. In fact, the righteous in Matthew 25:37–39 were so unimpressed by the reward motive for doing good that they could not remember when they did the good things cited by the Lord. Apparently the promise of reward does not spoil the conduct coming from it or Jesus would not have used it; nor does it contradict the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith alone. We cannot demand recompense from the Lord, but he can sovereignly give rewards if he so wills.

Finally, two things should be pointed out. According to Romans 8:8 and Hebrews 11:6, it is impossible for unbelievers to do anything that fundamentally meets with God’s approval or that will receive a reward from God, no matter how impressive their deeds may be. However, once one is a believer, even as small a service as a cup of cold water given in the Lord’s name (Mark 9:41) will not go without divine notice and reward. Second, even the rewards earned are totally a result of God’s grace since all successful labor for Christ is accomplished by Christ working in and through us. In Romans 15:18, Paul says he will not dare to speak of any accomplishment except those Christ has done through him.

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Romans 15:18

³¹ Gerig, W. L. (1996). [Reward](#). In *Evangelical dictionary of biblical theology* (electronic ed., pp. 685–687). Baker Book House.



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18 I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done—

REWARD Recompense for good or evil; most often it suggests a benefit for favorable compensation. Both good and evil are rewarded or punished, and man's responsibility and accountability are involved in an ethical sense. Related terms such as "wages," "hire," "recompense," or "requital" are a part of the broader concept. In this fullest sense, the operation of reward ranges from the consequences resulting from dealings between people to God's compensation for obedience or disobedience, from the consequences of actions felt in this life to divine recompense in the life to come.

To Greek and Hebrew minds, the concept of reward suggested the ideal of the wholeness of an action, the completion of a deed. Just as work was completed for a man in the payment of wages, so it was assumed that an action naturally carried certain results, either reward or punishment. The overtones of commercial transactions were not absent, as when the reward is referred to as "wages." Thus Paul says, "The wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). The idea involves an equal return commensurate with the action performed.

The biblical conception of reward was both ethical and religious. The covenant of God made with Israel was evidence of God's loving favor; it promised good things to Israel on the condition of their obedience to God's commands. Disobedience was a violation of the covenant and would bring disaster and death. Deuteronomy 28 spells out the blessings that obedience would bring and also the national disasters that would come upon Israel if they did not observe what was right and good in the sight of the Lord (see also Lv 26). In the period of the wilderness wanderings, failure to obey on the part of the people and their leaders brought suffering and death. The history of the judges and the kings was written in terms of reward for faithfulness and punishment for sin and idolatry. Earthly victory and the national welfare depended on obedience and faithfulness to the Lord (Jos 1:7–9; cf. Jgs 2).

The pattern of reward and punishment was not always carried out. The Jews believed that God would be a merciful, forgiving God. Forgiveness involved the removal of the punishment for sin. "He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor requite us according to our iniquities" (Ps 103:10, RSV).

The writer of Ecclesiastes found that life did not work out so neatly and that the doctrine of retribution did not always apply in the span of an individual life. There is a somewhat cynical note when the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper. Job's friends take the position that his sickness is the result of some hidden sin. Job maintains his integrity, and for him the answer lies outside the pattern of strict reward for righteousness and punishment for evil. In the outcome Job is rewarded for his good life.

In Jesus' day Judaism had changed significantly. The legal system of the judges had been replaced with Roman law. But Judaism had no hesitation about recognizing the merit of good



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works and exhorting people to accumulate a store of merit on a basis of which God would bless them (Tob 4:7–10; Eccles 51:30). The Pharisees believed that accurate and conscientious observance of the law would oblige God to recompense them for their performances. The individual who did much was to expect reward from God, while every transgression entailed its corresponding recompense for evil. What was not repaid in this life would be a part of a future reward.

Reward was a significant part of Jesus' teaching, especially in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5–7). The Beatitudes proclaimed that the blessing of God would come upon all people who exhibited certain moral characteristics (Mt 5:1–12). The individual who acts to receive the praise of others shall receive that and nothing more, but the one whose motives call him to please God shall be rewarded by God (6:1, 4, 6, 18). However, Jesus sharply curbed this idea when he taught the parable of the laborers (20:1–16). Here each was paid the same amount no matter how long he had worked. Jesus calls us to work for motives higher than reward. In the discourse on the good shepherd, the hireling who only works for wages is contrasted with the shepherd who is willing to lay down his life for the sheep (Jn 10:11–14). The servant who had only done his duty deserves no reward (Lk 17:9–10).

Beginning with Paul, the idea of reward, especially as it relates to salvation, is seen in a drastically different light. No longer is salvation considered to be the result of an individual having done more good than evil in life. Salvation is an act of divine favor that no one can earn (Rom 4:4–5). Salvation is not earned but given by a loving, beneficent God. The idea of reward does not disappear. Reward results from good done after salvation is attained. First Corinthians 3:8–14 teaches that the quality of a person's works will be examined and rewarded but that salvation does not hinge upon good works. However, works do have an important place in one's eternal destiny (Col 3:24; Rv 14:13).

See also Crown; Judgment.³²

³² Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). In [Tyndale Bible dictionary](#) (pp. 1131–1132). Tyndale House Publishers.