



Why Teach About Rewards?

The word *reward* (*misthos*) comes from the Greek word for pay or wages. While salvation is absolutely free, rewards are clearly earned. Reward passages are found throughout the Old and New Testaments. Could something so prominent be illegitimate? Here are ten reasons why Christians should be taught about rewards:

To emphasize our eternal significance. As God's children, we enjoy a relationship with Him now and in eternity. The quality of that relationship can be enhanced forever as a reward for our present and temporary lives. Rewards remind us that who we are outlasts this life. Rom. 8:17; Heb. 11:16

To teach our responsibility in this life. That God rewards us for present choices makes us accountable for those choices. Worthy actions, thoughts, and words will bear the fruit of reward in eternity. Conversely, that which is unworthy will cause the loss of reward and shame. Rom. 14:10-12; 1 John 2:28

To enhance our present life. Rewards are not only eternal; some begin in this life. They can greatly increase the enjoyment of our present experience. Matt. 16:25; Mark 10:29-31

To appreciate God's pleasure in giving rewards. God initiates rewards because He is pleased to do so. And who are we to deny God pleasure? He delights to bless His children with good things. It is a common and commendable human urge to express appreciation for or reward good behavior in our own children. Would we expect less from our heavenly Father? Matt. 6:6, 18; 25:21

To give the proper framework for interpreting the Bible. Many rewards passages are incorrectly interpreted as salvation passages. This hopelessly confuses God's free grace in salvation with God's earned rewards in the Christian's life. The result is a theology that undermines faith alone in Christ alone and the Christian's assurance. For example, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 is a rewards passage that some wrongly interpret as a salvation passage. That would mean the apostle Paul lacked assurance, since he based it on his performance. Matt. 10:32-33; Rev. 2-3

To motivate us to do the good works which God purposes for us. Ephesians 2:10 says God created us in Jesus Christ to do good works. While not the only motivation, rewards are one way God encourages us to do what He wants. 1 Tim. 6:17-19; 2 John 2:8

To balance our concept of God's justice. God punishes unbelievers according to the degree of their evil deeds. It makes sense that He would also reward believers according to the goodness of their deeds. If proportionate retribution curbs wickedness, then proportionate rewards cultivate righteousness. 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:12; 22:12

To prepare us for eternal service. Since some rewards imply an increased capacity to serve God and others, and if that capacity is carried into eternity, then they will help us better serve Him there. The Bible promises that we will reign with Jesus Christ. The extent of our rule is rewarded



according to our faithfulness in this life. Stewardship is constantly connected with rewards for the faithful discharge of responsibilities. Matt. 24:45-51; 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27; 2 Tim. 2:12

To legitimately motivate us to godly living. When rewards passages are wrongly interpreted as salvation passages, the unavoidable motivation for good works is to validate one's salvation and escape hell. Fear can easily become the motive for good works. But fear of hell can never motivate the believer, who is eternally secure. It should only motivate the unbeliever. The believer can only fear loss of rewards. But even that fear is only one of many motives for godly living. Deeds done from unworthy motives will be revealed for what they are and will not be rewarded. 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 13:1-3

To bring greater glory to God. If rewards increase our participation in God's glory, or give us a greater capacity to experience God's glory, then our rewards also enable us to give Him more glory. In Revelation 4:10 the 24 elders cast their crowns before Christ's throne. Whoever these elders represent, the crowns that they wear certainly symbolize reward, honor, and glory given them for some reason. They are then able to use that honor to glorify God by offering Him their crowns. In other words, they honor God more by having crowns than if they didn't. The rewards we receive will better enable us to bring Him more glory. Eph. 1:11-12; 1 Pet. 5:4

Conclusion

Initial salvation by the absolutely free grace of God does not conflict with the subsequent merit of rewards in the Christian life. Rewards are not the only, or necessarily the best, motivation for godly living. Love, gratitude, and duty are some of the highest motivations for serving God in this life. But there is nothing wrong with the encouragement and consolation that rewards bring. Since rewards are decreed and designed by God, they shouldn't be considered inferior or scorned in contempt. Every Christian should be taught about rewards.