

1 Corinthians 3:12-15

Verses 12-13:

--The judgment seat of Christ—or Bema seat—is directly named in **Romans 14:10** and **2 Corinthians 5:10** and referenced a number of other times including here.

--Paul speaks about this reality as if it were something they were very well aware of. Yet sadly, in our day, there are many that have never heard this truth. They have no anticipation either for or against it. *Sad especially for pastors who are supposed to help prepare people for their day of evaluation!*

--**the Day**—We all have an inescapable appointment. The Day should not come upon any of us as a shock. This doctrine is not hidden in the Word of God. We should all live in the light of the Day that we will stand before Jesus Christ to give an account of our lives here on earth.

--*What, How, Why, and as Much* as we sowed.

--Do we live according to what will be revealed in that Day?

--**It will be revealed by** fire—All *our* works—not Christ’s work on our behalf—will be tested. There is nothing in our lives that is truly hidden or secret. If you are carrying secrets you are only prolonging your sin in them.

--Daily place yourself open and vulnerable before Jesus Christ now and you will not fear to be before Him on the Day.

Verse 14: Reward!

--What we see here in **gold, silver, precious stones** is what is also emphasized in other places. The two main ideas being—Variety and Value.

--First, Variety.

--Eternal rewards, like the God who gives them, are uniquely various and incomparably valuable. Even when we trust God’s promises of reward as literal and true, many people still tend to think of those rewards in a very limited way. I would dare to say that the regular thought of heaven is something like this: Walking in a shiny city with golden streets, living in a spacious, golden, sterile, and mostly empty mansion, all while wearing a crown that is again, golden and shiny, but a bit awkward. In summation: lots of gold, lots of empty space, lots of flat bland surfaces, and lots of unconfessed boredom.

--After we have trudged that far our imagination begins to fade and in shameful fear, we struggle to color in any blank spots and simply give up on clinging to any concrete hopes. We know our eternal days have to be filled with something more but to discover what that could be seems beyond us. So, in the end, we just throw up our hands and tell ourselves to trust that God will somehow make it worth it.

--God has given us so much more hope than that! His kingdom will be filled with His treasures, which He has promised to disperse among His children as eternal rewards. A simple reading of Scripture will prove that rewards will fill more of our heavenly existence than we often think.

--Certainly, the new heavens and new earth are a part of that reward. As will be the New Jerusalem and the eternal dwelling place that Jesus has promised to prepare for us. Yet our rewards will involve more than the earth we live on, or the city we live in, or the possessions we enjoy.

--The Bible makes it clear that these rewards will touch more than what we can hold in our hands or place on our head.

1) First, eternal rewards will be a part of our daily life and service in heaven.

--John the Apostle, seeing inside the New Jerusalem, tells us ***and His servants shall serve Him (Rev. 22:3).***

--So we also discover that eternal service will be part of our eternal reward. This is mentioned in numerous ways throughout the Scriptures. ***To Him who has loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen (Rev. 1:6).***

--Or again, ***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 (Mt. 25:21)."***

--Also, ***He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more (Rev. 3:12).***

--So we see that our rewards are more than what we *will get*. They are also a part of what we *will do* for all eternity. They will be a part of our purpose—the practical ways we please and glorify God for all eternity. *Faithful kings, priests, and rulers are actually pretty busy people!*

--Since this is revealed, doesn't it also make sense that our Father would test our faithfulness to handle passing earthly things before He places in our hands eternal and heavenly things? Be faithful with every little thing He gives you to do now and you will be well-pleased then.

2) Second, eternal rewards will be a part of our personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

--The Scriptures reveal to us rewards of intimate and personal interaction with our Savior. We see commendations such as ***Well done good and faithful servant (Mt. 25:21).***

--And also, ***I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels (Rev. 3:5).***

--We see remarkably humble promises such as, ***Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find them watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them (Lk. 12:37).***

--We also see promises of intimate interaction known only between the individual and their Savior. ***And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it (Rev. 2:17).***

--And also, ***I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name (Rev. 3:12).***

*C.S. Lewis says of **Revelation 2:17** in (The Problem of Pain): “*What can be more a man’s own than this new name which even in eternity remains a secret between God and him? And what shall we take this secrecy to mean? Surely, that each of the redeemed shall forever know and praise some one aspect of the divine beauty better than any other creature can. Why else were individuals created, but that God, loving all infinitely, should love each differently?*”*

--These promises are remarkable! What an incredible revelation our Father has given us! O to be confessed by Jesus Christ! O to be marked by Jesus Christ! O to be drawn into intimate connection with Jesus’ name!

--We often take for granted our nearness to Christ. Stay close to Him now and He will reward you with incredible nearness to Him in eternity. For all those who are battling dryness here on earth, rest assured your laboring to abide in Him will bring you into a measure of personal intimacy that will far exceed the dryness you endured on earth.

3) Third, eternal rewards will be a part of the glory and ability of our resurrected bodies.

--Here our reward is seen in the literal brightness of our new bodies. ***And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever (Dan. 12:3).***

--Also, Paul would say, ***There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies, but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15:40-41).***

--And the writer of Hebrews would encourage us to follow the faithful example of the saints before us, saying, ***Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection (Heb. 11:35).***

--All of us cannot wait to cast off these vile bodies and be clothed with a body that is immortal, powerful, incorruptible, and glorious. To those suffering here on this earth, rest assured the glory of your new body is simply a breath away. The power and glory you will know on your first day in heaven will outweigh any lifetime of suffering you could endure here and now. *Puts in perspective the discontent with our bodies here (cutting, trans, age) and what Jesus did for us.*

4) Fourth, some eternal rewards are beyond our comprehension in their reality and depth.

--What could it possibly mean when Christ promises, ***I will give him the morning star (Rev. 2:28)?!***

--Who could actually know the fullness of Christ’s promise, ***I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God (Rev. 2:7)?!***

--Some of God's rewards are more than we could ever comprehend. They will be bound up in the parts of heaven that you and I are not told about because they have not yet come into the heart or mind of men. *It's good to have some mystery and surprise!*

--There are many other ways that we might categorize the rewards that God promises to His faithful followers, but the majority of our rewards come in the form of blessings that will enhance our daily enjoyment days without end.

--So we have promised to us: dwelling places, treasures, crowns, robes, and even foods such as ***the hidden manna*** and also ***the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month.***

--So when I say that God's promised rewards have variety—I am making something of an understatement. It should be obvious to simple faith that God is not seeking to be ambiguous about His promised reward. In fact, God is seeking to cause us to hope in the fact that the glory of His reward will touch every aspect of our eternal life.

--The Word of God reveals His reward enhancing our eternal earth, our eternal city, our eternal dwelling places, our eternal bodies, our eternal food, our eternal clothing, our eternal service, and our eternal personal relationship with Him.

--Not only that, but what God has given us is certainly not exhaustive. Even so, the wonder and variety we find is meant to stir our hearts for the things above.

--It is also important to remember that the variety of gifts does not mean that their reception is random or haphazard. Christ, in speaking with His disciples, and after challenging their devotion, says this: ***He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward (Mt. 10:41-42).***

--Here in these verses, we see Christ measuring out exactly who is serving, and how they are serving, and what their service is with.

--We see this connection continued throughout the Word of God as specific crowns are mentioned as rewards to specific trials or acts of faithfulness such as: a martyr's death, enduring temptation, faithfully pastoring God's flock, and loving His appearing.

--We also see Christ offering a variety of promises to those that overcome in each of the seven churches in the book of Revelation. Each church is different, each challenge they face is different, and therefore each church is subsequently promised a different reward .

--In all these things Jesus promises His disciples an exactly measured reward. Even the simplest gift, a cup of cold water, will not slip is His gaze or miss out on the fitting and promised recompense.

--So what does the sincere disciple of Christ find here? A pure and God-given hope, that as the acts and events of our lives are various and many, so too will our heavenly reward be manifold and plentiful. To the disciple who believes that His Master is truly a Rewarder, all of life, the big and small, is infused with eternal value.

--Second, Value:

--Not only will our reward be as unique, and beautiful, and blessed as the God who gives it, but we see in the Scriptures that God wants us to believe in the incomparable value of what He is giving. **Gold, Silver, Precious Stones** are meant to convey that these rewards are exceedingly great and precious! We will not be ashamed in God because we will discover that the value of what He has promised our devotion is worth more than any suffering we face to obtain it. Paul states this principle clearly.

--To the Romans, he says, ***For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Rom. 8:18).***

--To the Corinthians he says, ***For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Cor. 4:16-17).***

--The powerful reasoning here is clear. All the suffering and afflictions that we face in this life—as real and as difficult as they are—will seem like a small price to pay for the value of the reward that God will bless us with.

--God does not promise heaven on earth, but He does promise that heaven will be worth anything we could possibly endure on earth. The Bible does not teach the Christian life is easy. The Bible teaches that the Christian life is worth it.

--Now, that all sounds very nice, but in the gritty reality of daily life we either believe God's Word or we don't. How do we prove that we trust the value of God's reward? We prove our trust in our day to day acts of obedience and by where we place the treasure of our hearts.

--Jesus makes it clear that our reward will be great—in the fullest sense that such a humble word can convey. He would clearly say: ***But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High (Lk. 6:35).***

--Consider this, what Jesus Christ declares to be *great*, is great indeed. When He promises great reward in heaven that promise should motivate us more than any temporary difficulty we find here discourages us. Do not allow unbelief to cause you to think otherwise! ***Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God you may receive the promise (Heb. 10:35-36).***

--Do you think that Peter or John ever dreamed of having their names etched into the New Jerusalem? Do you think that unimaginable gift is all that Christ has rewarded them with? I think not!

--What do such rewards tell us? That God is The Great Giver—who only and always gives good gifts and who will prove to us what He apparently said very often: *that it is better to give than to receive*. The more seriously we cast our lives on His promises, the more seriously we will be overjoyed that we did.

--When God shares His everlasting kingdom with His sons and daughters, with ingenious variety and glorious value, it will be in a fashion that is worthy of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

--What will we know at that moment? When we stand before Jesus Christ our Savior and are rewarded by Him personally?

--In that moment we will know that what God told us about heaven was always true. We will know that His Word was sure. We will know that He is Faithful and True. We will know that the hardships of the earth are not worthy to compare with our first day in the kingdom of heaven. We will know the weight of glory that God has called us to.

--Praise Almighty God that His Word is always true!

--Allow me to quote G.D. Watson from his book, (*Our Own God*): **“There are three wonders to God’s love for us; the first is, that he should create us out of nothing, and endow us with such marvelous gifts and faculties; and the second wonder is, that his love for us should lead him to redeem us at such enormous cost from an awful fall; and the third wonder of his love is, that he should invent a way to pay us for our little services to him, and give us such stupendous rewards for such little things as we do and suffer for him. If we resist temptation, or spend an hour in prayer, or give money to the poor, or speak a kind word to a soul, or read thoughtfully the Bible, or meditate upon God’s perfections, or bear a little reproach for Jesus, or do any little thing for him, he seems eager to reward us for it, by giving us such sweet blessings, such tokens of favor, as if we had really befriended him, when the fact is we have only been seeking our own salvation, and all the while have owed him a debt ten thousand times greater than we could possibly pay. God loves us so well that he seems to invent excuses for blessing and rewarding us. Even a cup of cold water, given in his name, is to have a reward. How easy it is to think about God, and yet Malachi tells us, that when Christ comes to make up his jewels, there will be much reward for those “that thought upon {God’s} name.” So many times our dear Savior uses the word “great” in connection with coming rewards, so that for a few sufferings, for a few tears, for a few toils, which in reality are essential to our own welfare, Jesus says, “great is your reward in heaven.” It looks as if God was beside himself in love for us. Just see, out of his love he gave us this wonderful existence, and then gave us grace to repent, to believe, and to love him in return, and out of his love gave us the sanctifying Spirit, to live, and labor for him; and then out of his love he contrives to reward us, with honors and glories in the age to come. He gives us the love to love him with, and then rewards us for loving him with his own love. Did you ever see the beat of it, in all the world? If we pondered these things, would not our hearts burn within us, with a feverish desire to love him up to all our capacity?”**

Verse 15: Loss!

--**Wood, Hay, Straw** are indicative of things that are not fitting in the kingdom of God. They are things that need to be consumed by the fire of God's holiness.

--When the Scriptures warn us of something it is important. When that warning is repeated it means that we need to hear it over and over again.

--I will freely admit that we are not given all the details of what that loss will be, or what it will feel like, or what its full implications are. All we know is that the loss is real, and we are warned not to go there!

--This reality of loss of reward—not salvation—is picked up in numerous other Scriptures:

--Jesus warned His followers not to be like the Pharisees in their praying, giving, and fasting, because, ***Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward (Mt. 6:5).***

--Instead, they were to pray, give, and fast simply and humbly because: ***Your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly (Mt. 6:4).***

--Jesus would say to His followers: ***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 (Mt. 6:1).***

--Jesus would again say: ***And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward (Mt. 10:42).***

--Paul would warn the Colossians saying, ***Let no one cheat you of your reward (Col. 2:18).***

--Paul would also warn Timothy saying, ***And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules (2 Tim. 2:5).***

--John would warn the saints saying, ***Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward (2 John 1:8).***

--Christ Himself would warn the church of Philadelphia saying, ***Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown (Rev. 3:11).***

--Now, warnings are never popular and I do not expect that what I am about to say will ever be a popular message. The sobering truth of loss at the judgment seat of Christ does not flatter us, build our reputations, or stroke our egos. *It's not positive, encouraging, K-love*

--All Christians love to hear about God's grace and the unfailing blessings of our salvation. As we should. Even so, the Holy Spirit knows that we need to hear both promises of reward and warnings of loss.

--When we simply read all these passages, we are clearly warned that our personal rewards can be lost. Jesus Christ never gives a warning without cause. When Jesus warns, He means it.

--Why loss at all?

--Now, though this truth of loss may seem fearful and foreign to our idea of God, there is a healthy encouragement to it. The doctrine of eternal rewards, when given its proper weight of truth, does much to balance the realities of obedience and grace in a believer's life.

--The fact that a believer may forfeit his or her right to eternal rewards due to unfaithfulness, disobedience, prideful motives, selfishness, and other rebellious sin provides a strong reason for us to shun the idea of presuming on God's abounding grace.

--We all know those who claim the name of Christ, but also say things like: *I'm saved, so what difference does this sin really make? . . . I don't care what the Bible says, I know that God will forgive me. . . We all sin, that doesn't mean I am not going to heaven. . . I will follow Him again one day. . . God knows my heart. . .*

--Does this type of attitude mean that these individuals are not saved? Maybe and maybe not! The reality is that we are never called to assure ourselves of another's salvation. What is clear is the fact that they will face loss at the judgment seat of Christ. The reality of loss at the Bema Seat is the balancing truth on the other side of God's incredible grace and patience with sinners.

--Here is what the Bible makes clear: *There is grace in Christ for sinners but there is reward from Christ for faithful servants.*

--Yes, we will all enter heaven with a measure of disobedience in our lives, but any Christian that would make light of their sinful actions will find the loss of eternal reward at the Bema Seat a deterrent to continued disobedience.

--There is also one more point that is important to make. Anyone who feels that the loss of eternal reward is too small a consequence for the direct disobedience of some Christians is foolishly underestimating the joy and value of God's promised rewards.

--Can anyone really believe that those who want the best this world has to offer for a short time, will think it a small consequence that they have thrown away the best that heaven has to offer for all eternity?

--Is there any scenario where trading a passing earthly land, home, or pleasure for eternal lands, homes, or pleasures can be considered a small consequence? Certainly not! No momentary sinful pleasure will ever compete with an eternal weight of glory.

--It is simply the lack of teaching and emphasis on this needed doctrine of eternal reward and eternal loss that would allow people to entrain such carnal thoughts. If the consequences of the Bema Seat are good enough for God, they ought to be good enough for us, even if we do not yet see the full implications of reward and loss.

--The reality of loss at the Bema Seat is God's wake up call to every rebellious son or daughter who is recklessly throwing away heaven for the passing pleasures of this present evil world, all under the guise of understanding God's patience and grace. *A single faithful day in this life is eternally worth it!*

--In like manner, any Christian seeking to serve, labor, work, sow, and follow Christ in this wicked world will find the reality of the Bema Seat an encouragement to greater faithfulness.

--While others may be momentarily enjoying sin and storing up loss; the faithful follower of Christ will turn his eyes back to things above and continue to lay up treasure in heaven.

--No one is getting away with anything. No good deed will go unrewarded. No bad deed will go unjudged. God's books are open, His eyes see all the earth and His pen is copying every deed. Judgment will come and it will begin at the house of God. That is why we need to keep our eyes on our Rewarder and take heed to ourselves that no man steals the crown that our loving, gracious, Heavenly Father would rejoice to place on our heads.

--Believer, do not allow Satan to discourage your labor of love because the blatant and willful sin of others seems to be unchecked. Understand that Satan was the first to pollute his heart in the very presence of God and the loss he incurred was unimaginable. Satan knows in a very real way what it is to feel the loss of heavenly blessing and experience and he is keen to make disciples that will follow in his footsteps.

--This reality of loss is an act of love in and of itself because I will *want* all of the wood, hay, and straw of my life burned away for all eternity when I look at it with Jesus Christ.

**Buechner (Wishful Thinking): "The New Testament proclaims that at some unforeseeable time in the future, God will ring down the final curtain on history, and there will come a Day on which all our days and all the judgments upon us and all our judgments upon each other will themselves be judged. The judge will be Christ. In other words, the one who judges us most finally will be the one who loves us most fully.*

*Romantic love is blind to everything except what is lovable and lovely, but Christ's love sees us with terrible clarity and sees us whole. Christ's love so wishes our joy that it is ruthless against everything in us that diminishes our joy. The worst sentence Love can pass is that we behold the suffering which Love has endured for our sake, and that is also our acquittal. The justice and mercy of the judge are ultimately one."**

--But if this is true won't we all be sad in heaven?

--Here I would just like to make the point and joy and loss and not mutually exclusive.

--Now I would like to speak a word to those who fear that they have squandered many eternal rewards. Every follower of Jesus will look back at periods, or years, or particular moments of life and feel that they have struggled to believe the best of their Father, failed to please their Savior, and surrendered to the lusts of the flesh instead of the pleading of the Holy Spirit. There will only be one perfect man at the Bema Seat of Christ.

--God has not designed eternal rewards to stain eternity but to add glory and blessing.

--Isaac Watts noted, *"There is no envy among the heavenly inhabitants; nor does Paul receive the less because Cephas or Apollos has a large share. Every vessel has its capacity enlarged to a proper extent by the God of nature and grace, and every vessel is completely filled, and feels itself forever full and forever happy: then there cannot be found the shadow of envy among them."*

--Jonathan Edwards reasons that, *“The saints that are highest in glory will be the lowest in humbleness of mind, for their superior humility is part of their superior holiness.”*

--Augustine, when speaking about the differences of glory in heaven, said, *“God will be all in all in such a way, that, as God is love, love will bring it about that what is possessed by each will be common to all. For in this way everyone really possesses it, when he loves to see in another what he has not himself. There will not, therefore, be any envying amid this diversity of brightness, since in all of them will be reigning the unity of love.”*

--The problem with us here and now is that reward and loss causes envy and covetousness in us or pride rubs it in our noses and causes us grief. Neither of those things will ever happen in heaven because we will be perfect morally.

--What this means is that those who are greatly rewarded will never succumb to pride. By virtue of God’s gracious dealings with them, they will also receive a greater spirit of love and humility. Those who are rewarded less shall never envy another who may be rewarded more than themselves.

--In fact, those who are more like Christ will be loved all the more for it and Christ Himself will be loved all the more for being such a gracious Rewarder! Heavenly love will purify differences of reward.

--Even now, as I look at my own heart and life, I can see that the people I love with a pure and unselfish love are those that I rejoice in their blessing. For example, I would have no greater joy than to know that my two daughters will love God more than me, please God more than me, and enter into their eternal home with greater rewards than me. If I knew their eternal destiny to be greater than mine, if I knew that they would far surpass me in glory, and grace, and reward, I would bow before God with inexpressible gratitude. If I could sacrifice my life to secure that reality for them, I would. I trust that other fathers and mothers know this is more than mere sentiment.

--In heaven, rewards will cause no pain or division because we will finally and truly be able to rejoice with those who rejoice.

--In heaven, we will finally and truly realize that godliness with contentment is great gain.

--In heaven, we will finally and truly esteem others better than ourselves.

--In heaven, we will finally and truly be like Jesus Christ, the One who hands out each and every reward and takes greater joy in giving than receiving.

--Still, we are to heed Paul’s warning! ***If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.***

--We don’t want a saved soul and a wasted life.

--What does the apostle Peter say to us in regard to all of this? ***Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:11).***