

Eternal Rewards - How my earthly choices make an eternal difference

Sign Title: Rewards - Earthly choices make an eternal difference

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If you are new to Faith EFC, I would like to welcome you. My name is Kurt and I am one of the pastors. Last week we talked about Hell and the reality of eternal, conscious punishment of those who do not know Christ. The existence of Hell, as the Bible defines it, is probably the most controversial topic of our Christian faith because Hell is horrible. This week we move from the most controversial topic in our faith to what may be the most neglected topic, the doctrine of eternal rewards. Just like a watered down understanding of hell will hurt us, so will ignorance of the eternal rewards God offers us. What we learn this morning will change the way you live your life.

Let me introduce this topic to you with a little story. I went to a Christian college in Pennsylvania. While it is a Christian college, and many of the students know Christ, that didn't mean the temptations of being young and single were absent from the school. One acquaintance of mine was tired of the sexual restrictions our faith has and he decided to be sexually active with his girlfriend. He knew it was against God's desire for his life to be sexually active outside of marriage but he found a way to justify it in his mind. It would be OK, wasn't it God's job to forgive him anyway? What do you think? Could he sin without worry of consequences because God will always forgive?

Let's talk about something a little closer to home. What about the man or the woman who struggles with internet pornography? Statistics tells us a number of us in the room are struggling with that. Is it as simple as asking God to forgive

us and walking away free from any consequences until days or weeks later when it happens again? Is our slate wiped clean by Christ so we don't have to worry about our sin tampering with our eternal destiny? After all, isn't it God's job to forgive us.

What about the Billy Grahams of this world who work hard for Christ? They sacrifice much of their lives for Christ and maybe even die for Christ. In eternity, how will they compare to the Christian couch potatoes? Will everyone's experience of heaven be the same? While we wish heaven's joy was the same for everyone, intrinsically something tells us it won't be. What will be the difference? That is the subject of our discussion this morning, the doctrine of eternal rewards.

We have misconceptions about final judgment.

In one sense, as Christians, our sins are forgiven and separated from us, otherwise we couldn't be in heaven.

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. John 5:24 (ESV)

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1 (ESV)

Through Christ, we are forgiven for our sins. They are separated from us as far as the East is from the West (Psalm 103:12) but...

My life will not escape serious review.

I know this is hard to hear, but we need to rid our minds of the cherished hope that our failures will never return to haunt us. I am not talking about our

failures and sins before we knew Christ. I am talking about our willful sins after we knew Christ. Even as Christians, our lives are seriously reviewed by God.

Remember the story of Ananias and Sapphira who lied about the price of a piece of property they sold? They wanted to keep some of the profit for themselves. While they could have kept whatever they wanted from the sale, it was a lie to say they gave all the money and appear more generous than they were. Were they Christians? Of course! That didn't mean their lives would escape a serious review. God struck them dead for their dishonesty.

King David, who committed the twin sins of adultery and murder, was judged for his sin even after he confessed it and was assured of God's forgiveness.

David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die." 2 Samuel 12:13–14 (ESV)

If Ananias and Sapphira remind us God judges us for unconfessed sin, David reminds us that God judges us for sins that have been confessed and forgiven.

Paul reminds us that if God doesn't judge us for our willful sins on earth, even though we are forgiven Christians, he will judge us for our lives when we get to heaven.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. 2 Corinthians 5:10 (ESV)

Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God;...So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. Romans 14:10, 12 (ESV)

While all Christians are forgiven through Christ, that doesn't mean God will not review our lives and reward us accordingly. We must not conclude that every Christian will do well when they stand before Christ. Many of us might stand before Him in shame as we understand the immense cost Christ paid for our sin and the wonder of the rewards offered to us that we will not receive because of our willful sin, even though it is forgiven sin.

Just as there are degrees of punishment in hell, there will be degrees of reward in heaven. What we do with our life for the fame of Christ now will have a ripple affect that will cross into eternity.

I am forgiven for my sins, but it still matters how I live.

The Bible is very clear there is only one way to be in heaven. It is faith in Christ that saves us.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2:8–9 (ESV)

BUT, while the Bible is also clear we are not saved by our works, that does not mean we are not to work. The works we do after we come to Christ are special to God.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

As Christians, we must remember that after coming to Christ, we are not saved to sit, we are saved to work. God gives to each of us gifts and talents to serve him. Using our gifts and talents for the fame of Christ is the work God calls us to do.

Hebrews 12 also reminds us that we are not just to work for Christ but sometimes God *tests* us. Sometimes God puts particularly stressful situations into our life to build our character and grow our reliance on him. Anyone been there before? If we pass the test well, he will give us greater responsibility for him on earth, but he also promises to reward us with greater responsibilities in heaven.

So while I am not saved by my works, I am still to work for Christ by serving him with my gifts and talents and passing the tests he puts us through with flying colors because we have a growing reliance on Jesus through them.

Rewards are a legitimate motivation for serving Christ.

Some will say we should serve God out of love for what he has done for us in Christ and for love alone. Personally, I agree, we should. The more we understand what Christ has done for us, the more we will want to serve Christ out of love. Amazingly, God doesn't want to motivate us with just a greater comprehension of his love. It is God's idea to also motivate us to serve him with the prospect of an eternal reward. Eternal rewards for how we live and how well we suffer are God's idea, not ours.

If you think of it, this really isn't a bad idea. God built us to be motivated by the prospect of a reward. Think of all the training and discipline that goes into getting a silly piece of plastic and wood for the Vince Lombardi trophy? How do businesses motivate their best salesmen? A trip to Hawaii, as a reward. If those are rewards that motivate people on earth, imagine the motivation that is ours when we look at the real trophy in heaven.

Motivating people with the prospect of an eternal reward is not something new. That is what motivated Moses.

choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. Hebrews 11:25–26 (ESV)

Jesus motivated people by the prospect of an eternal reward.

But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great,... Luke 6:35 (ESV)

This life is a training ground for the real life in the next. As Christians, how we live our life now will be rewarded by Christ in the next life, either to our shame as we realize what we lost, or to our joy as we realize what we have gained. The person I am today is preparing me to be the person I will be for eternity.

What do eternal rewards look like?

We regain more than we lost.

Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. Matthew 19:28–29 (ESV)

The clear message is those who, for the sake of Christ, were deprived of the joy of their children or their homes or their families or they took a lower paying job, they will be repayed with much greater things than they left behind. Every sacrifice we make for Christ is truly not a sacrifice in the scheme of eternity. God promises to repay us.

We often think of missionaries as the great sacrificers. Look at all they give up for the sake of the gospel to live in a foreign land far away from those they know and love. A missionary is not someone who is boring and doesn’t like

pleasure. A missionary is someone who is a pleasure addict and wants God to pay them back with greater pleasure.

We gain greater glory with Christ.

The Spirit himself bears witness to our spirit that we are God's children. And if children, then heirs (namely, heirs of God and also fellow heirs with Christ) – if indeed we suffer with him so we may also be glorified with him. For I consider that our present sufferings cannot even be compared to the glory that will be revealed to us. Romans 8:16–18 (NET)

I used a different translation because it is hard to show what is happening in the text. It says that because we are God's children, we are heirs with Christ. Because Christ suffered the supreme sacrifice of himself in obedience to the Father's will, he was given the place of highest exaltation and glory in heaven, the right hand of God the father. He is so glorified that the light he emits in the new creation replaces the light of the sun. Paul says that as brothers and sisters of Christ, if God puts us in a position where we have to suffer for Christ, remember that in eternity, the exact opposite will happen to us as our reward. The more we suffer with Christ, the more glorious we will be in heaven.

So when you find yourself suffering for Christ, take heart, the more we suffer for Christ, the greater the glory you will receive eternally.

We gain greater rulership with Christ.

And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.' Luke 19:17 (ESV)

In this parable in Luke 19, the clear teaching is that those who were faithful with what God entrusted them with in this life will be rewarded with even greater responsibilities in the next life.

So what do we stand to gain at the Judgment Seat of God? We will regain all we have lost for Christ plus many times more, the more we have suffered for Christ, the greater the glory we will have and the more faithful we are with the money talents and resources God entrusts us with today, the more he will entrust us to rule over in eternity.

How can I squander my rewards?

The Bible doesn't just talk about the rewards we stand to gain in Christ, it talks about how we can lose them.

Failing to build with quality on the foundation of Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul writes to the Corinthians about the new Christian teachers they have in town. Apparently they are doing a great job of drawing a crowd. They are entertaining fellas. Paul is concerned because while they are drawing a crowd, it doesn't look like they are maturing people in Christ. He warns that what a church or ministry is all about will be revealed by God.

Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw — each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. 1 Corinthians 3:12–15 (ESV)

The quality of what we build with our lives for Christ will someday be revealed. The things that are ultimately worthless will be burned up and the things that are spiritually valuable will stand up. This is a great reminder for us in church leadership about the importance of what we preach and how we grow the church. We are trying to build a church that is passionate for Christ before we are trying to build a crowd.

I find this a very sobering thought.

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. James 3:1 (ESV)

Want to make your judgment tougher at the judgment seat of Christ?

Teach the church, lead a Faith University class or work with the youth group. The teachers of Christ's Word will be judged with greater strictness.

Willful sin squanders my reward.

knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. Colossians 3:24–25 (ESV)

Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? Romans 2:3 (ESV)

Remember, my friend who was the college student involved in pre-marital sex? He was involved in sex because he wants joy and pleasure. God doesn't blame him for wanting pleasure and joy. The problem is that he was squandering the much greater joy and pleasure that God wants to give him as a reward for saying, "No." The reward to sexual purity is better than sex or it wouldn't be considered a reward! Think about that the next time you are tempted by sin. The reward for saying, "No" to the temptation is better than any pleasure the sin of the temptation can bring.

How can I gain more reward?

Joyful acceptance of persecution.

"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:11–12 (ESV)

When we pay a price for following Christ, God notes it and promises to reward us for it in heaven. When you are at school and they laugh at you because you went to a “before school Bible study” or you are at work and you are denied a promotion because of your faith; accept it joyfully. Every time we suffer for Christ, rejoice knowing that God will reward us for suffering well for him.

This was the attitude of the disciples when they suffered. They were giving each other high-fives after they went through it.

Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. Acts 5:41 (ESV)

Financial generosity in the name of Christ.

“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 (ESV)

God promises to reward us for our generosity towards him. The financial sacrifices we make toward Christ’s kingdom and the fame of his name are never lost, they are only relocated and returned to us at a much greater interest rate. The best investment going is God’s kingdom. If you want to learn more about this, check the web-site out. I taught a whole series on this called, “Buried Treasure.”

Practical care for those in need.

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

When we help those in need, Christ will reward us by repaying us when we help people who can't repay us. What a great motivation for generosity towards those who are poor and weak. We don't get this. That is why there is not a sign up list we fight over to do nursing home and hospital visits. We don't realize God *promises* to reward us for those kind of things.

Joyful acceptance of the suffering God ordains.

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:6–7 (ESV)

At different times, all of us will suffer. For some of us, it will be physical suffering, like cancer. For others of us, it will be the unexpected loss of a job we love. For others, it could be a wound in our family through the rebellion of a spouse or a child. God ordains that we will suffer trials as Christians. The reason he allow trials is so the genuineness of our faith will be tested and therefore seen by others. When we are put in the vice and squeezed, what is really important to us on the inside shows up on the outside. Those who love Christ in the midst of suffering draw closer to him in those trials, for those whose faith is a charade, they will fall away from Christ when they suffer.

Now notice what Peter says will happen to those who suffer successfully for Christ. There will be praise, glory and honor when Christ comes. If we suffer well, it will add to our eternal reward.

Hearty work in my vocation.

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. Colossians 3:23–24 (ESV)

Did you realize that we can heap up eternal reward tomorrow on the job by simply standing out from the crowd and doing our best at work? How we work where we work goes towards our eternal reward. Half-baked work and half-done jobs will result in less eternal reward.

Every good thing I do goes towards my reward.

knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. Ephesians 6:8 (ESV)

Every good thing we do we will receive back from the Lord. Nothing will fail to be rewarded. Isn't this an incredible motivation? God desires to reward us! Live for the reward.

Squandered opportunities and willful sin, while forgiven, will result in a loss of reward. There will be decreased joy, and decreased rulership and decreased glory. The more passionately we follow Christ, the richer our reward will be.

When will I get my reward?

This is a good question. There are a number of different understandings on this. Some believe there are three times of judgment found in Scripture. A time of judgment for the nations, a judgment for Christians and a judgment for unbelievers. Myself, cut me some grace on this if you don't agree with me, I believe there is only one great final judgment before we enter our eternal state where believers will be rewarded. Those without Christ will be assigned to varying degrees of punishment in hell and those who are forgiven through Christ

will be given varying rewards to enjoy for eternity on the New Heavens and Earth. Some of the Bible scholars here may disagree with me on this and that is OK.

...he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” Acts 17:30–31 (ESV)

Eventually we will discover who is right about when this judgment takes place. While the Bible is not crystal clear on the time believers receive their rewards, what it is crystal clear is that we will be rewarded and our rewards will be beyond what we imagined.

Conclusion

When we think of Jesus coming back for us, think of him coming with his rewards.

“Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. Revelation 22:12 (NIV)

Let’s pray

Father, I know that some people here this morning are feeling pretty crummy. They didn’t even know there were rewards you are wanting to give us. I pray for them, that from this day forward they would serve you with zeal knowing that you desire to richly reward them in eternity.

I know other people this morning didn’t think their holiness would impact eternity. They didn’t know that holiness now will be richly rewarded by you forever. They didn’t know that saying, “No” to the pleasures of sin now is guaranteed to be rewarded by even greater pleasures from you for eternity.

Others didn’t realize the sheer joy of sacrifice. They didn’t know that whatever they give up for Christ now will be richly repaid many times over by you in eternity.

Jesus, even though you don’t have to offer us eternal rewards for our life and that it is motivation enough to serve you just for who you are and what you have done for us, thank you for offering to reward us and wanting to give us that reward.

We want this new understanding of your goodness and your rewards to change the way we live, not just today, but for the rest of our life. Amen



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