

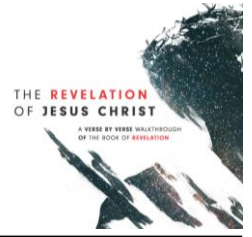
Title: Revelation, Part 19: Is it Wrong to Seek Rewards from God?

Speaker: Charles Stone

Passage: Rev. 11:1-19

Big idea: Scripture Shows Us Six Traits of True Rewards

Memory verse of the month: Rev 11: 15b The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.



I've never been much of an athlete, but I could run pretty fast. At the university I went to, Ga Tech, they had an extensive program for students who wanted to do sports but weren't good enough for the collegiate level. And every spring they would hold a track meet and run all the field events and running events as if it were colleges competing, only it was lower rung athletes at Tech who competed.

I decided beforehand that I would run the 220 and half mile, roughly equal to the 800 meter run. I placed second in the 220 and won the half mile. But what was so satisfying for me was that I broke 2 minutes in the half mile, a pretty good mark even running for a collegiate team at the time. I ran a 1.58.9.

They had a little award ceremony at the end and I got two awards, two trophies.



After the race I went to celebrate, not to a bar, but to what is called the Varsity, the world's largest hamburger joint and I got an FO. An FO is like a dreamcicle milkshake. The best.

So after my hard work all those months as I worked out daily, I was awarded this trophy and I rewarded myself with the FO. This was extremely satisfying.

In life we are often rewarded by others or reward ourselves when we accomplish certain things. No one looks down on receiving well-deserved rewards.

But what about awards or rewards for Christian faithfulness or service or generosity. Should we do these things with receiving a reward in mind? Well I've titled the message today with this question.

Is it Wrong to Seek Rewards from God?

And in the chapter of Revelation that we will look at today, chapter 11, I'm going give an overview of the chapter and then zero in on a verse in that chapter that tells us a bit about rewards and then I will use that as a springboard to look at what the entire bible says about rewards. It is quite appropriate to talk about rewards for faithful service because as we approach the end times, it will be more difficult to live for Christ to serve faithfully and stand up for Christ without some social, financial or physical persecution. So the question in some people's minds may be, is it worth it? So here's today's big idea.



Big idea: Scripture Shows us Six Traits of True Rewards

I'm going to give these to you by using the acronym [R.E.W.A.R.D.](#)

I say 6 but there are probably many more traits. Hopefully this acronym will jog your memory.

Thus far in our study of Revelation we've learned that it is a book meant to encourage Christians as things get more upside down in the world as we get closer to the end times. We don't know the dates of Jesus' return, but Revelation gives us an idea of the kinds of things that will happen more and more as the end times approach.

John had been given these visions about what the future holds, and he wrote them down as the book of Revelation. We've seen groups of sevens: 7 cities in what is now W Turkey that the book was originally written to, 7 seals that sealed this scroll that when Jesus broke each seal a portion of the scroll was read which revealed more about the end times. Then John records visions of 7 angels with trumpets. When an angel sounded a trumpet, it revealed more insight about these difficulties to come on earth. The 7 seals, the 7 trumpets and another 7 coming up, 7 bowls, are like looking at something similar from different angles. These various sevens give different perspectives of some of the same events in the end times.

Last week the vision included a small scroll which an angel gave to John which symbolizes God's word. He told him to eat it which tells us that we should take in God's word because it feeds our soul.

The Big idea that week was:

If you want the Bible to make a difference in your life, you gotta' do 4 things.

1. Take the initiative to engage God's Word.
2. Enjoy the message of God's Word.
3. Obey the hard parts of God's Word.
4. Go and do God's Word.

Now, after this little scroll image, John explains the content in the little scroll we see in today's chapter, chapter 11. But, there are many views about this chapter. I will do my best to explain it.

Let's let the Bible Project animation give us an overview. [Rev 11](#)

- <https://bibleproject.com/learn/revelation/> 8.51 through the end

Rev. 11:1 I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshipers there.

John is supposed to measure the temple, altar and its worshippers. To measure or number something means to set apart something holy from that which is profane. This image gives us the idea that true believers, those in the temple (the church) are fully protected from spiritual harm in the last days. They will be protected from the judgment that will come and will have strength to deal with persecution they will experience. This persecution will last for a limited period of time.

John is then told not to measure the outer courts which surrounded the temple where non-Jews could gather in the Temple days. This implies that there are a number of fake Christians who will not be spiritually protected in those last days.

Then he talks about two witnesses.

³ And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy

These witnesses are given power to prophetically preach and do miracles and are protected by God during the last days. Scholars differ about who they are, from two principles to Moses and Elijah to Paul and Peter, to the true Church throughout the entire church age. I believe these witnesses symbolize the church throughout the ages to be God's witnesses because the church is meant to be a powerful missionary organization.

After a period of time, these witnesses are killed.

⁷ Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them.

The beast is the antichristian world system urged on by satan to battle the church and it will seem that the church is dead, when the church's public testimony and influence has been smothered and silenced by the world. Wickedness and

evil will abound. He mentions Sodom and Egypt to point to immorality like in Sodom and oppression like in Egypt that will be the norm as the church's voice is silenced.

In fact John says that the world will actually celebrate the apparent demise of the church.

We see this today as a Christian worldview is falling more and more out of favor in our culture and in many places, including Canada, there is vehement opposition to a biblical world view in some areas of life.

But this apparent death of the church is only for a short time as the witnesses come to life.

¹¹ But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them. ¹² Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on.

God has the last word. Goodness and holiness will triumph. The church will rise again and is restored. John describes God's kingdom beginning to be fully and completely established. The day of judgment comes and although the world is frozen in fear, many turn to Christ.

The rapture occurs, when believers are raised from the dead and those living are brought into heaven. Now, depending on a person's end time perspective, some believe the rapture happens before a tribulation period. Some believe it happens half-way through. And some believe it happens at the end of the tribulation period.

No matter the timing you may believe, the common truth is that Jesus will return to set up his eternal kingdom and we will be given new bodies and live with Jesus forever. The timing of before, within, or after the tribulation is not as important as the fact that Jesus will bring us to himself and establish his kingdom once and for all.

This end day scenario parallels the pattern we saw when Jesus came. He came to proclaim the gospel, satanic opposition arose, Jesus was violently killed, the world looked on in satisfaction, and then vindication came when Jesus rose and ascended to heaven in a cloud.

¹⁴ The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon.

This order is not the order in which these historical events occur, but the order in which John received the visions.

Here John does not describe in detail this phase of the end times like he did in the prior two woes but in the general sense that those who have rejected God and persecuted the church will now face ultimate defeat because Jesus will set up his kingdom as the final judgment occurs on those who reject God.

¹⁵ The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."

He is viewing this retroactively as already having happened and there is great worship in heaven as the church rejoices in the fact that the Lord has reached the zenith of His power and authority, now publicly displayed.

Here we come to verse 18 that speaks of rewards.

The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great—

Here we see rewards being mentioned.

Let's go back to my original question.

Is it Wrong to Seek Rewards from God?

Well, apparently not because part of the final days includes rewards God will give to his faithful followers, whether they are in a public role like prophets or preachers, or not in a public role.

So let's look at rewards from the perspective of our [Big idea: Scripture Shows us Six Traits of True Rewards](#)

R.E.W.A.R.D.

Real and tangible

Relational vs transactional.

The word reward in the Bible is used in two ways: an appropriate compensation for a particular action or giving payment in return for something.

Rewards in the bible is not just some ethereal, obscure concept. Biblical rewards are not just metaphors or figures of speech. They are real and tangible, as real as you and I are real, and we experience them both in this life and in the next. And they come as a result of our intentional effort of faithful service. More on that later.

Enjoyed in heaven, and here on earth

Enjoyed in heaven, and here on earth

The Bible talks about a final judgement every person will face related to our activities on earth.

2Corinthians 5.10 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.

Works here refer to what we have done with our

- resources
- time,
- talents,
- energy,
- possessions,
- opportunities.

In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul describes our lives like a building built with various building materials, some long lasting and some not. We will be judged based on the various building materials we use which relate to the tangible things in this life that we all have: our time, talent, treasures and opportunities.

The end times it will be a time of commendation and celebration when God gives out rewards.

Biblical rewards seem to be weighted more toward eternal rather than temporal ones, though we can't eliminate the temporal, rewards we experience in this life.

The caution here is that in thinking about earthly rewards we don't get caught up in the faulty beliefs of the prosperity gospel, that health, wealth and physical prosperity will be guaranteed on earth if you are a faithful Christian.

That doesn't translate from the wealthy west to some poor nations in Africa, or Haiti or Cuba who show great commitment to Jesus but have little to show for it when it comes to material things.

Yet, I do believe God rewards faithfulness with blessings in this life. He does bless people financially who are wise with the use of their money and who give generously. He provides us with jobs we need and want to feed our families. He opens doors in business or schooling. But there is a biblical caveat here about what we do with these blessings. God rewards us so that we can be a blessing to others.

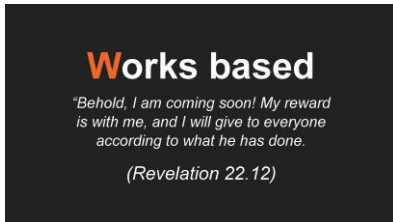
2 Corinthians 9.8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. ... 11 You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion...

So when we see God’s hand in our lives rewarding us for faithful service, ask, how can I use this reward to be a blessing to others as well. That puts your money, your education, your business, everything in a new light.

Real and tangible.

Enjoyed in heaven, but not exclusively

Works based



I have already hinted about this. Judaism recognized the merit of good works and exhorted people to accumulate a store of merit on a basis of which God would bless them. The Pharisees believed that accurate and conscientious observance of the law would oblige God to recompense them for their performances.¹

Because of that works/merit based perspective to earn acceptance by God that the Gospel negated because a relationship with God is now grace-based, we sometimes make any talk of works a dirty word.

Works don’t earn salvation or forgiveness or eternal life. They are a gift given to those who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus. More about that in a moment. However, works are very important when it comes to rewards.

Rewards are a result of our faithful works.

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.

So, God values our good works. He entrusts each of us with time, talents, treasure, possessions, and opportunities to do these good works and he will reward us based on whether or not we did them and if we did them with the right heart.

In the parable Jesus taught called the parable of the talents, he describes 3 people who were given differing amounts of money to invest while the owner was away. Two were faithful and one was not. The money given to them represents our money or time or gifts or opportunities. Jesus said,

Matthew 25.21 “His master replied, ‘Well done good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

He didn’t say, well said or well believed, but rather, well done.

What we do with our time, talents, money, and opportunities on this earth has eternal implications.

The problem is that many professing Christians lives tell a different story—

- from a passive commitment to Jesus,
- to limited financial investment in Kingdom work,
- to a consumer focus to their faith.

Heaven is not our reward, per se. It is a gift, regardless of our performance. But rewards are the result of faith-filled action on earth.

Rewards are based on what you do, not what you believe or what you say, but on how you faithfully give of your time, talent, and money and take advantage of the opportunities God gives you.

¹ Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). In *Tyndale Bible dictionary* (p. 1131). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

Corey Brown our worship pastor will like this illustration because he loves golf. I used to be an avid golfer as well but my frustration got the best of me every time I couldn't get it past that windmill.

One author put it this way: *This guy received an invitation to play Cypress Point, arguably the most spectacular golf course on planet Earth. While the invitation to play Cypress Point was free, he seldom had worked harder to prepare for anything in his life. For months he beat his body into submission. He lifted weights, worked on stretching exercises, and pounded thousands of golf balls, all the while dreaming of the day he would physically experience walking the fairways of Cypress Point.*

Without his strenuous preparation he still would have experienced the same cliff-side vistas and breathtaking views. He would still have been able to smell the fragrance of the Monterey Cypress and feel the refreshing sting of the salt air upon his face. All the hard work, however, added immeasurably to his experience.

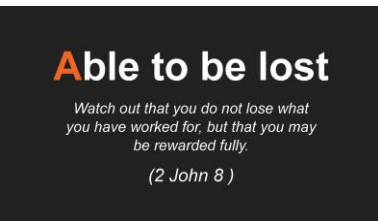
That is how heaven will be. As a master musician can appreciate Mozart more than an average music lover can, so too his strenuous training allowed him to more fully appreciate the architectural nuances of Cypress Point. As phenomenal as Cypress Point was, it pales by comparison to what Heaven and the reward there will be.

Real and tangible.

Enjoyed in heaven, but not exclusively

Works based

Able to be lost.



We can lose our rewards

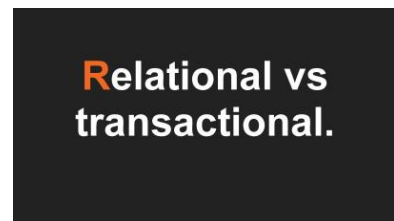
2 John 8 Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.

We don't lose our salvation, but we can lose our rewards. How?

One writer said that "It appears that we could lose a portion of our reward if we begin to neglect the *truth*. We can forfeit a portion of our reward if we stray from the life God has called us to. When we no longer love others enough to share the truth, comfort the needy, meet needs in an effort to demonstrate the love and nature and salvation of God, we risk losing the reward that could be ours. "

This speaks to finishing life well.

Relational vs transactional.



Relational means when one person does something for another person out of a heart of love, beneficence, grace, other centeredness. A transactional relationship is one when you do something for a person, you expect them to do something in return for you.

I clean up the kitchen for Sherryl, because I love her. that's relational.

I clean up the kitchen to soften her up so she will go see the new Marvel movie with me, that's transactional.

The concept of biblical rewards is rooted in a relationship with Jesus, not a transaction. We serve and obey him out of love because He first loved us. Our doing for Him is not transactional. God I did this for you. What are you going to do for me in return?

I needed to say that first because it sets the stage for the last part of the acronym. Let's do a bit of review as I add the last one.

R.E.W.A.R.D.

RReal and tangible

Enjoyed in heaven, but not exclusively

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Able to be lost

Relational vs transactional

Designed to motivate us to do good works

Let's put that one on the screen by itself.

Designed to motivate us to do good works

With that statement in mind, if I am motivated by rewards in heaven or temporal rewards, is that a less noble motivation than to obey God solely out of love?

Or, does desire for rewards negate the joy of pure obedience? Let me try to answer that.

The Scriptures tell us that Moses, the Apostle Paul, and even Jesus served faithfully with an eye toward rewards. Heb 12.2 says that Jesus endured the cross "for the joy set before him." He found motivation for a reward awaiting Him.

Tim Challis (pastor/author) says, So if Moses, Paul and Jesus found motivation in eternal reward, and I dismiss reward as a motivation, am I not implying that they were wrongly motivated?

Scripture affirms motivation of rewards. And daily life does as well-sports, business, our kids. Why would God not use rewards to motivate his children?

I may feel like I am taking the moral high ground when I say, "I do it only it because it's right," but that is actually pride talking. It is pride telling me that I know better than God.

God wired us this way. Students work hard to get that A. We don't think less of them because of that. Parents offer a reward to their kids for eating their broccoli (ice cream for desert). Companies offer incentives for sales and bonuses at the end of the year. Hockey players work hard in practice to win games to hopefully win that coveted Stanley cup. We don't quibble about those things. That's the way God designed us.

Can it get overbalanced and become an unhealthy obsession to get the award? Sure. Any good thing can become an extreme, unhealthy obsession.

But, a desire for reward that motivates me to give God my best is an appropriate motive.

Author Randy Alcorn ..., It's God's idea for this close relationship between obedience and reward. We are designed to be motivated by incentive.

We have the joy and freedom of doing the right thing because it is the right thing and because I will receive God's reward.

They are complementary, not in conflict. God created us this way and designed us to be motivated by reward.

God rewards us because he loves us. God doesn't have to reward us. He wants to and takes great delight in it. Matthew reminds us again that in the end times, Jesus is going to give us many eternal rewards based on our faithfulness.

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.



Remember my FO story when I rewarded myself with after my race? Well, the enjoyment wore off after a few minutes as does most of the enjoyment we get from purely physical experiences. The happiness wears off and I needed another FO if I wanted to repeat that enjoyable taste experience.

However, as we remain faithful in our service to Jesus when living for Him get harder as the end times approach, remember that God is storing up rewards in heaven that await us and the joy of those rewards will never wear off.

So keep an eternal perspective knowing that one day you will reap incredible eternal rewards remembering that here on earth it is a God honoring motive to do faithful works for him with an eye toward his coming rewards.