

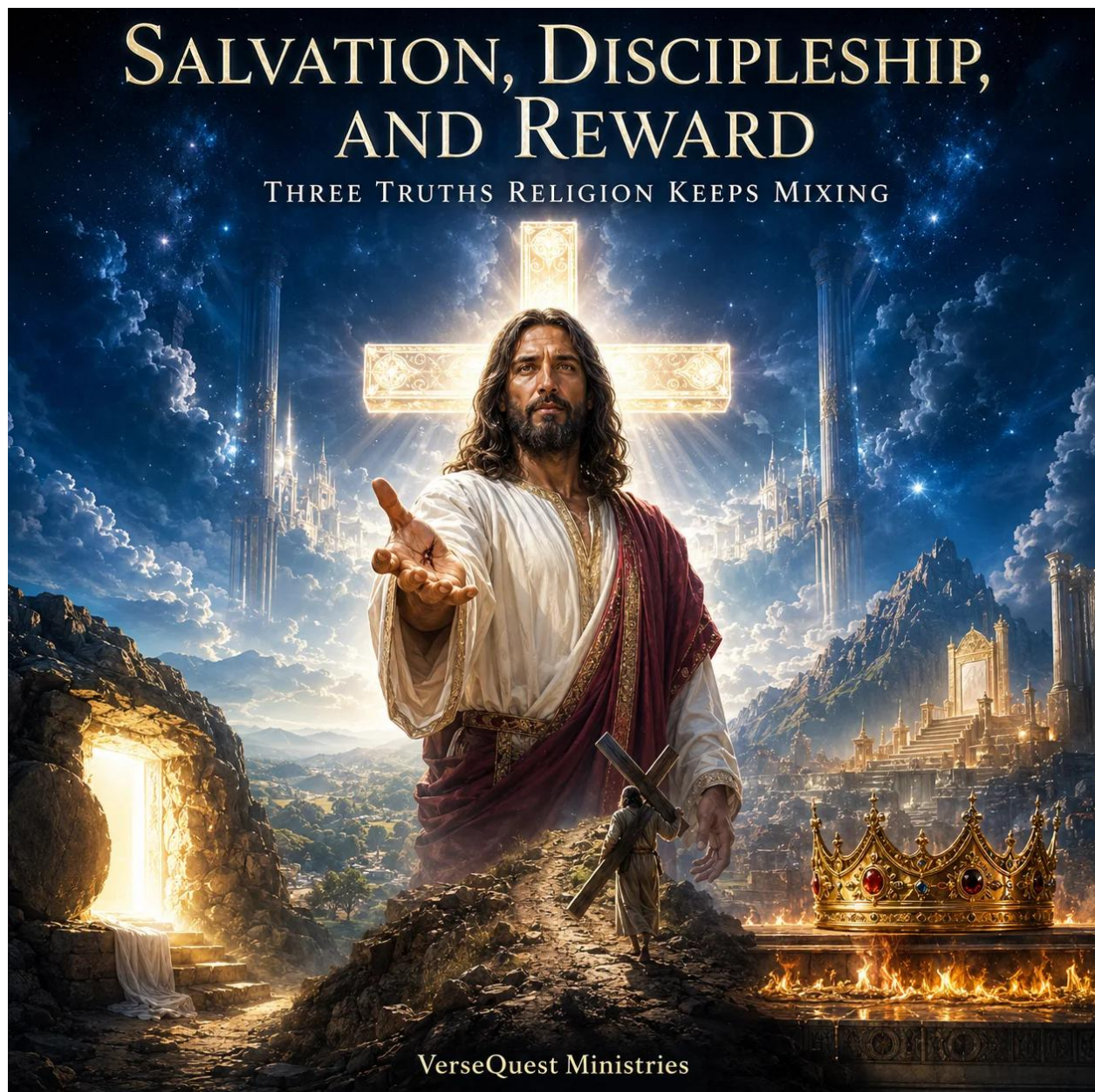
Salvation Discipleship and Reward

Three Truths Religion Keeps Mixing

Series 1-10

By Paul Tackett

VerseQuest Ministries





SALVATION, DISCIPLESHIP, AND REWARD

Three Truths Religion Keeps Mixing

Copyright © 2026 VerseQuest Ministries

Written by Paul Tackett

All rights reserved.

This publication may be downloaded, printed, and shared in its complete and unaltered form for personal study, church use, classroom instruction, and other noncommercial ministry purposes. Proper attribution to Paul Tackett and VerseQuest Ministries must remain with the publication.

No portion of this book may be altered, rewritten, repackaged, resold, included in a commercial product, or reproduced for profit without prior written permission from VerseQuest Ministries. The essays, original commentary, study arrangements, titles, descriptions, charts, graphics, and distinctive presentation contained in this publication remain the intellectual property of VerseQuest Ministries.

All Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

This publication is intended for biblical teaching and personal study. References to religious doctrines, organizations, teachers, or theological positions are presented for examination and evaluation in light of the King James Bible.

First Digital Edition — 2026

Published by VerseQuest Ministries

United States of America

Table of Contents

Introduction

Salvation Discipleship and Reward — Three Truths Religion Keeps Mixing

1 of 10: Salvation Discipleship and Reward — Three Doors Religion Painted the Same Color

2 of 10: Salvation Discipleship and Reward — The Gift Religion Keeps Dragging to the Checkout Counter

3 of 10: Salvation Discipleship and Reward — Calvary's Cross and the Christian's Cross Are Not the Same Cross

4 of 10: Salvation Discipleship and Reward — Losing Your Life Without Losing Eternal Life

5 of 10: Salvation Discipleship and Reward — Good Works Belong in the Workshop Not the Maternity Ward

6 of 10: Salvation Discipleship and Reward — The Throne Has a Fellowship the Pew Never Promised

7 of 10: Salvation Discipleship and Reward — When the Christian's Work Meets the Christian's Fire

8 of 10: Salvation Discipleship and Reward — Heaven Is Free but Crowns Are Not Handed Out at the Door

9 of 10: Salvation Discipleship and Reward — Saved as by Fire and Empty-Handed Before the King

10 of 10: Salvation Discipleship and Reward — Entering the Kingdom and Inheriting the Kingdom Are Not Identical

Conclusion

Salvation Discipleship and Reward — Three Truths Religion Keeps Mixing

Bible Study Chart

Salvation Discipleship and Reward — Three Truths Religion Keeps Mixing

Salvation Discipleship and Reward

Three Truths Religion Keeps Mixing

Series Introduction

Religion has taken three plain Bible truths, dumped them into the same theological barrel, stirred them with a denominational broom, and then complained that the Scriptures are confusing. Salvation, discipleship, and reward belong to the same Christian life, but they do not answer the same question, operate upon the same terms, or produce the same result. Salvation answers the sinner's condemnation and settles his eternal position before God. Discipleship concerns the saved believer's earthly walk behind a rejected Saviour. Reward concerns the future examination of that believer's labor before Jesus Christ. Salvation is received freely by faith, discipleship costs the believer his claim to self-rule, and reward is granted according to faithful service. Mix them together, and salvation acquires a price tag, discipleship becomes either another gospel or an empty slogan, and the Judgment Seat of Christ is reduced to a ceremonial pat on the head for everyone who managed to remain alive until the Rapture.

The Bible asks three different questions and provides three different answers. The Philippian jailer asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Paul and Silas answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:30–31). When Jesus addressed discipleship, however, He said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). When Paul discussed reward, he wrote, "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward" (1 Corinthians 3:14). Believing, cross-bearing, and building are all biblical, but they are not interchangeable. The sinner believes to receive eternal life. The believer bears his cross to follow Christ. The servant builds to receive reward. A doctor may prescribe three medicines to one patient without pouring them into the same bottle, and a Bible teacher ought to possess at least as much sense as a pharmacist.

Salvation begins with the finished work of Jesus Christ, not the unfinished promises of a sinner. Christ "died for our sins according to the scriptures," was buried, and "rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). He bore our sins in His own body on the tree, shed His precious blood for redemption, and declared, "It is finished" (John 19:30). The Son of God did not make a down payment at Calvary and leave the believer responsible for the remaining installments. He did not pay for past sins while leaving future sins to the maintenance department. He offered "one sacrifice for sins for ever" and sat down at the right hand of God (Hebrews 10:12). Religion keeps trying to stand Christ back up because a finished sacrifice is bad for the installment business.

Eternal life is therefore called “the gift of God” in Romans 6:23 and Ephesians 2:8. A gift cannot be simultaneously free and earned. Romans 11:6 says, “And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace.” Grace and works cannot share the saving contract without one canceling the other. If salvation depends upon baptism, church membership, sacraments, law keeping, moral reform, personal surrender, faithful endurance, or Christian service, then it is no longer the gift of God. It has become wages paid upon human performance. A preacher may still write “grace” across the church sign in letters tall enough to shade the parking lot, but if he presents the sinner with a bill at the altar, he is operating a religious checkout counter rather than preaching the gospel.

This does not mean repentance, obedience, baptism, separation, holiness, endurance, service, or good works have no biblical place. It means they must remain in the place God assigned them. Repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ belong in the sinner’s response to the gospel. Water baptism follows salvation as an act of obedience and identification. Good works follow the new birth as its proper fruit. Surrender and cross-bearing belong to discipleship. Endurance affects testimony, usefulness, victory, fellowship, crown, and reigning privilege. Religious confusion begins when men take truths belonging after salvation and move them in front of salvation as additional conditions. That is like putting fruit beneath the ground and demanding that it grow the root.

Ephesians 2:8–10 establishes the order beyond honest dispute. Believers are saved “by grace” and “through faith.” Salvation is “not of yourselves,” “the gift of God,” and “Not of works.” Only after closing every door to human boasting does Paul say, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” Works belong in the workshop, not the maternity ward. They do not produce the new birth, but the new birth should produce them. The believer is not saved by good works, yet he was not saved to become a spiritual houseplant—alive, stationary, decorative, and useful mainly for occupying space near a window. Grace saves without works and then teaches the saved man to work.

Discipleship begins where self-rule is challenged. Jesus said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself.” The great practical enemy of discipleship is not merely the devil outside the believer but the old self still campaigning for the throne within him. Self wants a Saviour from hell without a Lord over the schedule. It wants forgiveness without correction, security without accountability, promises without commands, crowns without running, and resurrection power without fellowship in Christ’s sufferings. Self is willing to follow Jesus provided Jesus travels in the direction self had already selected. The cross ends that arrangement. A cross is not religious jewelry for decorating the flesh; it is God’s instrument for ending the flesh’s claim to rule.

Calvary's cross and the Christian's cross must therefore be distinguished. Jesus Christ alone bore the sinner's sins, satisfied divine justice, and purchased redemption. No believer can add suffering, sacrifice, surrender, or devotion to that completed payment. The disciple's cross serves an entirely different purpose. It represents willing identification with a rejected Saviour and obedience when obedience becomes expensive. Calvary's cross saves the sinner; the believer's cross tests the disciple. One establishes eternal life, while the other exposes whether the saved man values Christ above comfort. Christ bore His cross because no sinner could bear it. The Christian bears his cross because Christ already did.

The disciple may lose his reputation, possessions, opportunities, ambitions, relationships, safety, freedom, and even physical life without losing eternal life. Jesus said, "whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 16:25). The believer who gives his temporary life to Christ discovers that nothing placed in Christ's hands was finally wasted. The believer who protects himself from every inconvenience may preserve his skin while losing the eternal usefulness his life could have possessed. Eternal security does not make a wasted Christian life impossible; it makes such waste more tragic. A careless believer can never go to hell, but he can send years of his Christian life into the fire ahead of him.

Reward enters where salvation and discipleship have already been separated. First Corinthians 3:11 identifies the foundation as Jesus Christ. The believer then builds upon that foundation with "gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble." The fire tries "every man's work of what sort it is." It does not determine whether Christ remains sufficient, whether the blood still cleanses, or whether everlasting life has unexpectedly expired. It examines what the saved man built. If the work abides, "he shall receive a reward." If the work burns, "he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." One verse secures the man and judges the work without confusing either verdict.

The Judgment Seat of Christ is therefore not a second Calvary, a Christian purgatory, or the Great White Throne Judgment of the unsaved dead. The believer's eternal condemnation was borne by Jesus Christ, and Romans 8:1 declares, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Nevertheless, every believer must appear before Christ "that every one may receive the things done in his body" (2 Corinthians 5:10). Christ will examine service, stewardship, opportunity, faithfulness, doctrine, sacrifice, speech, conduct, and motive. Salvation removes condemnation; it does not remove examination. Grace keeps the believer out of hell, but it does not keep his haystack out of the fire.

The fire will not be impressed by religious size. Men count crowds, buildings, money, books, sermons, followers, titles, baptisms, programs, and public recognition. Christ tries the

work “of what sort it is.” One ounce of gold will survive what ten wagonloads of hay cannot endure. An unnoticed act performed through charity may outweigh a celebrated ministry built through envy and self-promotion. First Corinthians 4:5 says the Lord “will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts.” Men see the platform; Christ sees the motive beneath it. Men admire the paint; Christ tests the lumber.

The New Testament crowns show that reward is neither imaginary nor automatically distributed. Paul speaks of an incorruptible crown connected with disciplined striving, a crown of rejoicing associated with souls, a crown of life for enduring temptation, a crown of glory for faithful shepherding, and a crown of righteousness for loving Christ’s appearing. These crowns do not improve salvation or decorate different classes of eternal life. They represent the righteous Judge’s recognition of particular faithfulness. Revelation 3:11 warns, “hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” Second John 8 warns believers to look to themselves that they “receive a full reward.” A crown that cannot be lost requires no warning to guard it, and a full reward implies the possibility of receiving less.

Inheritance and reigning responsibility must also be distinguished from sonship. Romans 8:16 says believers are “the children of God.” Verse 17 calls them “heirs of God” and then connects being “joint-heirs with Christ” with suffering beside Him. Second Timothy 2:12 says, “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.” The blood establishes family relationship, but faithful suffering affects royal privilege. Every believer belongs to Christ, but not every believer endured reproach, overcame temptation, finished his course, or remained loyal when obedience became expensive. The family may contain both faithful and unfaithful sons, but the righteous Father does not pretend their stewardship was identical.

This distinction explains the severe New Testament warnings concerning inheritance. First Corinthians 6, Galatians 5, and Ephesians 5 warn that carnality can cost a believer inheritance in the kingdom. These passages must not be twisted into teaching that the Holy Spirit unseals the Christian every time his flesh gains a victory, but neither may they be emptied until sin carries no meaningful consequence. A saved man can grieve the Spirit, reap corruption, suffer chastening, damage his testimony, lose usefulness, forfeit reward, and diminish his reigning privilege without becoming unborn. God possesses more disciplinary vocabulary than heaven and hell. A father can deny privilege without denying paternity.

The distinction also reconciles Paul and James without forcing either writer to surrender his inspired pen. Paul teaches that an ungodly sinner is justified before God by faith apart from works. James confronts the man who says he has faith while producing no visible evidence or practical usefulness. Paul points to Abraham in Genesis 15, where he believed God and

righteousness was placed to his account. James points to Genesis 22, where Abraham's later obedience demonstrated the faith he already possessed. Paul removes works from salvation's root; James demands works in faith's fruit. One guards the maternity ward from legalism, while the other orders the living man into the workshop.

This series will therefore reject both ditches with equal force. Legalism burdens salvation with discipleship conditions and leaves the believer staring at himself to determine whether Christ has done enough. Careless grace preaching empties discipleship and reward until the saved man can waste his life without serious future consequence. One has a weak Saviour who cannot keep the believer; the other has a weak Judge who refuses to examine him. The King James Bible presents neither weakness. Jesus Christ saves completely, keeps eternally, chastens faithfully, and judges righteously.

A Christian does not serve to become a son; he serves because he is one. He does not carry a cross to purchase heaven; he carries it because heaven was purchased for him. He does not labor to keep eternal life; he labors because eternal life has given his temporary life an eternal purpose. He does not run for salvation; he runs for the prize. He does not fear being cast into hell at the Judgment Seat; he fears standing before the pierced hands of Christ with nothing that survived the fire. Grace removes the terror of condemnation without removing the fear of wasted stewardship.

The believer's position in Christ is settled, his walk with Christ must be cultivated, and his reward from Christ remains to be determined. That single sentence preserves what religion keeps mixing. Position rests upon Christ's righteousness. The walk involves daily obedience, self-denial, separation, endurance, and dependence upon the Holy Spirit. Reward awaits the searching examination of Jesus Christ. Position cannot be improved, the walk can be strengthened or neglected, and reward can be gained or lost. A Christian may be fully accepted in Christ, poorly conducted on earth, and severely unrewarded before the King without a single contradiction appearing anywhere except in a poorly arranged theological system.

The ten essays in this series will follow those distinctions through the Scriptures. They will defend the gift religion keeps dragging to the checkout counter, separate Calvary's cross from the Christian's cross, explain how a believer can lose his temporary life without losing eternal life, put good works in their proper workshop, examine suffering and reigning, stand before the fire of the Judgment Seat, identify the crowns promised for faithful service, confront the possibility of arriving empty-handed, and distinguish entering the kingdom from receiving inheritance and royal responsibility within it. The goal is not to make grace cheap or discipleship comfortable. It is to let every Bible truth retain the price, purpose, and place God gave it.

Salvation is free, but it was not cheap. Discipleship is costly, but it does not pay for salvation. Reward is earned, but it does not replace eternal life. The blood answers condemnation, the cross-bearing walk answers discipleship, and the fire answers stewardship. The sinner must trust Christ without adding works. The believer must follow Christ without using grace as an excuse. The servant must labor with the certainty that Christ will judge his work. Keep those three truths in their proper rooms, and hundreds of manufactured contradictions disappear. Mix them, and religion produces a gospel with a price tag and a Christian life without consequences.

1 of 10: Salvation Discipleship and Reward — Three Doors Religion Painted the Same Color

Key Passage: 1 Corinthians 3:11–15

“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.”

Introduction

Religion has taken three doors that God plainly labeled and painted them all the same color. One door says **salvation**, another says **discipleship**, and the third says **reward**, but the religious contractor came along with a bucket of denominational paint and covered the signs. Now the sinner is told that he must live like a disciple before he can be saved, the believer is told that every warning about his conduct means he is about to lose eternal life, and the faithful servant is told that reward is merely another name for entering heaven. The result is a doctrinal hallway full of confused people trying to enter one room through another room’s door. Yet the King James Bible does not stutter on the matter. Salvation is the free gift of God received by faith in Jesus Christ. Discipleship is the costly path of following the Saviour after one has been saved. Reward is the future recompense granted at the Judgment Seat of Christ according to the believer’s service, suffering, faithfulness, motives, and stewardship. These truths are connected, but they are not interchangeable. A necktie, a belt, and a pair of shoes may all belong to the same man, but only a theologian could tie his shoes with his necktie and then write a commentary explaining why the mess was necessary in the original Greek.

The New Testament asks three different questions. The first is, **What must I do to be saved?** The answer is, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). The second is, **What must a saved man do to follow Christ faithfully?** The answer involves denying himself, taking up his cross, forsaking competing claims, obeying the word of God, enduring hardness, and presenting his body as a living sacrifice. The third is, **What will the believer receive for the life he lived after salvation?** That answer depends upon what he built upon the foundation, how he ran his race, whether he kept the faith, how he used what God placed in his hands, and whether his work survives the fire. One question concerns eternal life, another concerns the Christian walk, and the third concerns the believer’s accounting before Jesus Christ. Confusing them does not produce deep doctrine; it produces religious fog. A fog bank may make an ordinary ditch look mysterious, but it is still a ditch, and a Christian can still break his doctrinal axle by driving into it.

The distinction is set before us in the key passage. Paul says that the foundation is Jesus Christ, that believers build upon that foundation, that every man’s work will be tested, that some will receive reward, that others will suffer loss, and that the man whose work burns “shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” That one passage knocks the props out from under two opposite errors. It destroys the legalist’s claim that a believer who fails in service must therefore perish, because the man whose works burn is still saved. It also destroys the careless professor’s claim that Christian conduct carries no serious future consequence, because the saved man can suffer real and irrecoverable loss. The fire does not determine whether the foundation belongs to Christ; it determines what the believer built upon it. The Judgment Seat is not a second Calvary, and Jesus Christ will not be crucified again to discover whether His first payment was sufficient. The blood settles salvation, the cross-bearing life shapes discipleship, and the fire reveals reward. Religion mixes those three because a confused congregation is easier to control than an established believer who knows what God gave him freely, what Christ requires of him daily, and what awaits him eternally.

1. Salvation Concerns the Sinner’s Standing Before God

Salvation begins with a guilty sinner and a holy God, not with a church program designed to improve respectable people. “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). The sinner’s problem is not merely that he has developed unhealthy habits, failed to reach his potential, or suffered from low spiritual self-esteem. He is “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1), condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God, and utterly incapable of manufacturing the righteousness demanded by divine holiness. Isaiah said, “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). Notice that he did not merely condemn man’s drunkenness,

fornication, murder, and theft; he condemned man's righteousnesses. The best robe Adam's race can stitch together is still unfit for the courtroom of heaven. Religion spends its time embroidering the filthy rag, adding a denominational patch, spraying it with sacramental perfume, and calling the result a wedding garment. God looks at the whole religious laundry pile and says that none of it can cover the sinner's guilt.

That is why salvation must come entirely through Jesus Christ. He "was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Romans 4:25). He "bare our sins in his own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). God "hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). The sinner is not saved because God finally becomes impressed with his effort; he is saved because God is eternally satisfied with the work of His Son. Christ did not make a down payment at Calvary and leave the sinner to handle the monthly installments. He did not cry, "It is nearly finished," or, "It is finished if you can maintain it." He said, "It is finished" (John 19:30). The blood atonement is not a joint business venture between the Lamb of God and the sinner's good intentions. Salvation rests upon the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and faith receives what grace has provided. The sinner contributes the sin that made salvation necessary; Christ contributes everything that makes salvation possible.

When the sinner believes on Jesus Christ, his standing changes immediately and completely. John 5:24 declares, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." The verse does not say that he may receive everlasting life after a probationary period. It says he "hath" it. It does not say that he might pass from death unto life if his discipleship record remains satisfactory. It says he "is passed." Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Justification is God's judicial declaration concerning the believer's standing, not a weekly performance review conducted by nervous religionists. The believer is accepted "in the beloved" (Ephesians 1:6), complete in Christ (Colossians 2:10), sealed with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13), and placed into the body of Christ by the operation of God. His walk may stumble, his fellowship may be interrupted, his testimony may be damaged, and his reward may be diminished, but his standing rests in the perfect Son of God. A believer's feet may require washing, but God does not amputate him from the body every time they become dusty.

2. Salvation Is a Gift and Not a Contract for Wages

Ephesians 2:8–9 states the matter plainly enough for a child and too plainly for a religious professional who earns his living complicating it: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."

Grace means that salvation originates in God's favor rather than human merit. Faith is the empty hand receiving what Christ purchased. A gift ceases to be a gift when the recipient must earn it, deserve it, repay it, or maintain its ownership through satisfactory labor. Romans 6:23 contrasts the two systems with inspired precision: "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Wages are earned; gifts are received. Wages arise from the worker's performance; the gift arises from the giver's generosity. Eternal life is not God's gold watch awarded after fifty years of religious employment. It is His present gift to the sinner who trusts His Son.

Paul drives the nail through the board in Romans 4:4–5: "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." If salvation is earned, God owes it as a debt. If it is by grace, man cannot place God in his debt by working. Romans 11:6 makes the distinction absolute: "And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace." Religion wants a mixture because mixtures create markets. Give a man pure grace, and the middleman loses his leverage. Tell the sinner that Christ did everything necessary, and suddenly the religious cashier has nothing left to ring up. So men devise systems in which grace supposedly saves the sinner after works qualify him, sacraments assist him, endurance preserves him, and clergy certify him. They call the mixture "balance," but arsenic mixed with spring water is not balanced hydration. Adding works to grace does not improve the gospel; it destroys the meaning of grace.

Titus 3:5–7 says, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us," and then connects that salvation with regeneration, justification, grace, and the hope of eternal life. God does not save the righteous; He justifies the ungodly who believe on Christ. The sinner does not clean himself up so God can save a presentable version of him. He comes as a ruined son of Adam and trusts the Saviour who died for the ungodly. Good works will have an important place after salvation, but they have no place as part of its purchase price. The order is settled in Ephesians 2:8–10: saved by grace, not of works, and then "created in Christ Jesus unto good works." Works are the fruit of salvation, not its root; they are the evidence of life, not the price of birth. A baby does not breathe in order to be born; he breathes because he has been born. In the same manner, a Christian does not serve Christ in order to become alive in Him; he serves because God has already quickened him together with Christ.

3. Discipleship Concerns the Believer's Walk After Salvation

Discipleship is not another word for justification. A disciple is a learner and follower, and the terms of discipleship concern the believer's practical response to the Lord who saved him. Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross

daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). Notice the language: “If any man will.” The statement deals with willingness, surrender, and following. Christ is not describing the sinner’s contribution to the atonement; He is describing the cost of walking behind a rejected Saviour. The sinner receives eternal life by believing. The disciple takes up his cross by yielding. Faith receives the gift; discipleship embraces the path. Those two actions belong together in a healthy Christian life, but joining them does not make them identical. A wedding and a marriage belong together, yet the vows that begin the relationship are not the same thing as the daily faithfulness that should follow. Confusing the two will not strengthen either one.

Luke 14 gives some of the hardest demands of discipleship in the New Testament. Christ spoke of hating father, mother, wife, children, brethren, sisters, and one’s own life also in the comparative sense of placing Him above every rival claim. He said, “whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27). He concluded, “whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33). Religion reads those words and commonly commits one of two blunders. The legalist turns them into conditions for receiving eternal life, thereby making salvation dependent upon a degree of surrender that no honest man could claim to have perfected. The modern lightweight turns them into decorative sayings suitable for a coffee mug and continues following Christ only as long as Christ travels in the same direction as his comfort. The passage means exactly what it says about discipleship. Following Christ costs a man his claim to self-rule. Christ will not be carried around as a religious accessory in the trunk while Self sits behind the steering wheel.

The cost of discipleship may include reputation, convenience, money, relationships, ambitions, safety, and even physical life. Paul said, “Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Philippians 3:8). He was already a saved man when he pressed toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. His suffering did not purchase his justification, but it demonstrated the seriousness of his calling and prepared the ground for future reward. A disciple obeys when obedience is expensive, stands when standing is lonely, gives when giving pinches, speaks when silence would be safer, and remains faithful when applause has left the building. Christianity without discipleship produces saved people who know their destination but spend the journey asleep in the back seat. Salvation gives the believer a new position; discipleship requires him to walk worthy of that position. The position does not depend upon the walk, but the position ought to straighten the walk.

4. The Believer’s Cross Cannot Add to Christ’s Cross

Calvary's cross and the disciple's cross must never be confused. Christ's cross was substitutionary, sacrificial, atoning, and entirely sufficient. He died "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18). He became a curse for us (Galatians 3:13), shed His blood for the remission of sins, and offered one sacrifice for sins for ever (Hebrews 10:12). No believer can repeat that work, supplement it, or contribute suffering to its saving virtue. The cross Christ bore carried the sins of the world; the cross the believer bears concerns obedience to Christ in a world that rejected Him. One cross provides redemption, while the other displays devotion. One reconciles the sinner to God, while the other identifies the disciple with his rejected Lord. The difference is as great as the difference between the Lamb who died and the sinner for whom He died.

When Christ tells the believer to take up his cross, He is not inviting him to become a co-redeemer. He is calling him to accept the death of self-will. Paul expressed the truth in Galatians 2:20: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." The disciple's great enemy is not merely the devil outside him or the world around him, but the old self enthroned within him. Self wants salvation from hell while retaining lordship over the schedule, wallet, appetites, speech, associations, ambitions, and secret life. Self is perfectly willing to sing "Where He Leads Me I Will Follow" provided it receives the itinerary for approval. The cross ends that negotiation. A cross is not a padded chair for self-improvement; it is an instrument of death. Christ did not tell the believer to decorate himself, discover himself, affirm himself, or negotiate with himself. He said, "deny himself."

Yet failure in cross-bearing must not be twisted into proof that Christ's atonement failed. Peter denied the Lord three times, but Christ did not send him back to the Sea of Galilee to obtain eternal life a second time. The Corinthians were carnal, divided, proud, disorderly, and tolerant of scandalous sin, yet Paul still addressed them as sanctified in Christ Jesus and members of Christ's body. Their condition was disgraceful, but their correction rested upon the reality of their position. Paul did not cure carnality by denying grace; he used grace as the ground for demanding holiness. "Ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:20). The word "therefore" matters. They were not told to glorify God so that He might buy them. They were told to glorify Him because they had already been bought. Calvary establishes ownership; discipleship acknowledges it.

5. Reward Concerns the Believer's Future Accounting Before Christ

Second Corinthians 5:10 declares, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." Paul included himself with the word "we." This judgment concerns believers, and it concerns deeds performed in the body. It is not the Great White

Throne Judgment of Revelation 20, where the unsaved dead are judged and cast into the lake of fire. The believer's sins, in relation to eternal condemnation, were judged in Jesus Christ at Calvary. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Nevertheless, the believer's service will be judged for quality, motive, faithfulness, and reward. Escape from condemnation is not escape from accountability. Grace removes hell from the believer's future, but it does not remove the Judgment Seat.

First Corinthians 3 presents six building materials: gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, and stubble. The fire does not test how large the pile appears, how popular the builder became, how many plaques hung in his office, or how enthusiastically men applauded his construction. It tests "of what sort it is." Heaven's fire investigates quality. A wagonload of hay may look more impressive than a pocketful of diamonds until somebody strikes a match. Much religious activity is designed to appear large before men because men cannot see motives, measure spiritual substance, or inspect the hidden foundation. Jesus Christ can. First Corinthians 4:5 says that He "will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts." The Judgment Seat will expose not only what was done but why it was done. A sermon preached for applause and a cup of cold water given for Christ's sake may exchange positions when the fire reaches them.

Reward is granted when the believer's work abides. "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward" (1 Corinthians 3:14). The reward is not eternal life, because eternal life was already given freely in Christ. Reward concerns the divine recompense for faithful labor. Paul spoke of an incorruptible crown for disciplined service, a crown of rejoicing connected with souls, a crown of righteousness for loving Christ's appearing, a crown of life for enduring temptation, and a crown of glory for faithful shepherding. He ran to obtain; he fought to win; he kept his body under lest, after preaching to others, he should become a castaway—a disapproved workman rather than a damned child of God. The Christian does not labor to persuade God to keep His promise of salvation. He labors because salvation has placed him in the race, and he wants to finish without throwing away the prize.

6. Loss of Reward Is Not Loss of Eternal Life

The plainest statement in the passage is also the statement religion works hardest to blur: "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." The work burns; the man remains saved. The man suffers loss; he does not suffer damnation. The fire tests the building; it does not destroy the foundation. If language means anything, a saved man can arrive at the Judgment Seat with works that fail the test and can suffer real loss without losing eternal life. The verse does not say that he was nearly saved, temporarily saved, or saved until the smoke appeared. It says, "he himself

shall be saved.” A man must be carrying an impressive set of denominational spectacles to read “shall be saved” and announce that it means “shall be lost.”

The loss is serious precisely because salvation remains secure. If the careless believer were merely cast into hell, reward would become irrelevant; damnation would swallow every lesser consequence. But Scripture presents a saved man standing before Christ while the investment of his earthly life disappears in the fire. Years can burn. Opportunities can burn. Religious performances done for pride can burn. Ministries built upon envy, strife, manipulation, and self-promotion can burn. The man remains Christ’s, but what he built may amount to smoke and ashes. Second John 8 warns, “Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.” Revelation 3:11 says, “hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” A crown that cannot be lost requires no warning to hold it fast. God does not threaten His child with hell every time He warns him about forfeiture; sometimes He means exactly what He says—loss of reward.

This distinction gives eternal security its proper moral force. The critic says that if salvation cannot be lost, the believer will live however he pleases. That objection reveals a man who imagines hell to be the only meaningful consequence in the universe. A child may remain in the family while losing fellowship, privilege, inheritance, confidence, usefulness, and his father’s approval. A soldier may remain a citizen while being court-martialed for deserting his post. A servant may remain alive while losing his stewardship. Likewise, a believer can grieve the Holy Spirit, reap corruption from the flesh, experience chastening, ruin his testimony, injure other Christians, waste his calling, and suffer loss before Christ without becoming unborn. Eternal security is not a feather mattress beneath carnality; it is the solid ground from which God commands His children to stand, walk, fight, work, and finish faithfully.

7. Rightly Dividing the Three Truths Protects Both Grace and Godliness

When salvation and discipleship are mixed, discipleship conditions become counterfeit additions to the gospel. The sinner is told that he must forsake everything, take up his cross, surrender every area, endure to the end, and perform as a mature disciple before God will grant him eternal life. But if complete surrender is required for salvation, who has surrendered completely? If flawless discipleship proves conversion, who can survive an honest examination? The standard quietly changes according to the preacher’s convenience. He demands enough surrender to frighten the congregation but never enough to disqualify himself. He preaches absolute abandonment from a comfortable office, complete self-denial on a reliable salary, and the danger of worldly possessions while passing the offering plate twice. The result is not holiness but uncertainty, because

assurance rests upon the shifting sand of human performance instead of the finished work of Jesus Christ.

When salvation and reward are mixed, every warning about loss becomes a threat of hell, and every promise of reward becomes merely another description of entering heaven. That destroys the plain meaning of the words “gift,” “wages,” “reward,” “loss,” “crown,” and “inheritance.” It also leaves no vocabulary for God to warn His children about failure without threatening to disown them. The Bible’s language is more precise than the systems built to correct it. Salvation concerns birth into God’s family; discipleship concerns conduct within that family; reward concerns the Father’s future recognition and assignment. The believer’s union with Christ is settled, his communion with Christ can be hindered, and his compensation from Christ can be affected. Position, fellowship, and reward touch one Christian life, but they answer different questions. A doctor may examine the heart, the lungs, and the bones of one patient without declaring that the heart is merely a complicated ankle.

When free grace is preached without discipleship and reward, another error appears. Some men defend eternal security as though God saved Christians to become spiritual houseplants—alive, stationary, decorative, and useful mainly for occupying space near a window. Paul never used grace as an excuse for idleness. “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,” but that same grace is “teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly” (Titus 2:11–12). Grace saves without works and then teaches the saved man how to work. It gives life freely and then commands that life to be invested faithfully. The answer to legalism is not lawlessness, and the answer to fear is not laziness. Salvation is free, but the life salvation produces belongs to the One who paid for it.

Conclusion

Three doors stand before us, and the King James Bible has labeled every one of them. The door of salvation bears the words, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” The door of discipleship bears the words, “deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” The door of reward bears the words, “If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.” The sinner must enter the first door before he can walk meaningfully through the other two. A dead man cannot become a faithful disciple, and a man without the foundation cannot build upon it. Salvation gives life; discipleship directs that life; reward evaluates its investment. Grace establishes the relationship, obedience cultivates the walk, and the Judgment Seat reveals what the believer did with the days placed in his hands.

Religion paints the doors the same color because clear distinctions rob religious systems of their two favorite tools: fear and flattery. Legalism uses fear by telling believers that every stumble may send them to hell. Careless religion uses flattery by telling them that every saved person will receive the same commendation regardless of faithfulness. The Bible permits neither lie. The believer is safer in Christ than the legalist dares admit and more accountable to Christ than the libertine wants to remember. He cannot be condemned with the world, but he must appear before his Lord. He cannot lose the eternal life hidden with Christ in God, but he can lose what he might have gained through faithful service. He does not work to remain a son, but because he is a son, he ought to stop living like a stranger to his Father's house.

Let salvation remain free, discipleship remain costly, and reward remain conditional upon faithful service. Do not attach the disciple's cross to the gospel as though Christ's cross were insufficient. Do not detach Christian conduct from the Judgment Seat as though grace had abolished accountability. The foundation has already been laid, and that foundation is Jesus Christ. The question for the believer is no longer whether Christ's work will stand; heaven and earth may pass away before that work fails. The question is what we are building upon it. Every day places something on the structure. Every motive selects material. Every act of obedience lays another stone, and every hour surrendered to the flesh adds another armful of dry stubble. The fire is coming, the Judge is righteous, the foundation is secure, and only a fool would spend his entire Christian life collecting kindling.

2 of 10: Salvation Discipleship and Reward — The Gift Religion Keeps Dragging to the Checkout Counter

Key Passage: Romans 6:23

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Introduction

God calls eternal life a gift, but religion cannot resist dragging it to the checkout counter. The Lord places salvation into the sinner's empty hand, and religion immediately appears with a cash register, a membership form, a baptismal certificate, a list of conditions, and a payment schedule extending to the grave. Romans 6:23 draws a line that no honest Bible reader can erase: “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through

Jesus Christ our Lord.” Wages and gifts belong to opposite arrangements. Wages are owed because of work performed; a gift is freely given because of the giver’s purpose and generosity. Wages look backward at what the worker has earned; the gift proceeds from what the giver has chosen to provide. The sinner has already earned wages, and those wages are death. Eternal life cannot be placed on the same payroll, because God expressly calls it His gift. If a man must earn it, deserve it, maintain it, supplement it, or complete its purchase through personal performance, it is no longer a gift. Calling a religious payment plan “grace” does not make it grace any more than hanging a sign reading “Free Water” over a tollbooth makes the road free.

Salvation is free to the sinner because it was infinitely costly to the Saviour. The freeness of the gift does not mean that sin was cheap, judgment was imaginary, or God simply decided to ignore His own holiness. It means that Jesus Christ paid the entire price. He was “wounded for our transgressions,” “bruised for our iniquities,” and the LORD laid upon Him “the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:5–6). He “bare our sins in his own body on the tree” (1 Peter 2:24), redeemed us “with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18–19), and declared from the cross, “It is finished” (John 19:30). The debt was not reduced, postponed, refinanced, or divided between Christ and the sinner. It was paid. Calvary was not a down payment on a salvation the believer must finish purchasing through baptism, endurance, reform, or good behavior. The Son of God did not endure the wrath of God merely to lower the sinner’s monthly spiritual premium. Christ went all the way to Calvary because the sinner could not take one saving step toward God.

Every counterfeit gospel tampers with one of two truths: either it subtracts something from the person and work of Jesus Christ, or it adds something to the sinner’s reception of what Christ accomplished. Some systems openly teach salvation by ritual and merit. Others advertise grace in large letters and hide the conditions in fine print. They begin with faith but require sacraments to activate it, works to complete it, surrender to validate it, endurance to preserve it, or a lifetime of observable progress to prove that God ever gave it. The sinner is told that Christ saves completely, provided the sinner does his part completely enough. That is not good news; it is a religious contract written by a committee that cannot agree on the payment terms. The gospel declares that “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). The believing sinner rests upon that finished work. Religion keeps reaching for the receipt because religion cannot bear the thought of God receiving all the glory.

1. The Sinner Has Earned Death but Cannot Earn Life

Romans 6:23 begins with what man has earned: “the wages of sin is death.” Sin has a payroll, and payday is certain. God does not describe death as an unfortunate accident, a natural stage of human development, or the peaceful completion of a biological cycle. “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin” (Romans 5:12). Death is sin’s wage because sin is rebellion against the living God. The sinner does not merely possess a few character defects that need polishing; he stands guilty before the Judge of all the earth. “There is none righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10), and “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). The standard is not whether a man appears decent beside his neighbor but whether he measures up to the glory of God. Comparing sinners with sinners is like arranging corpses according to complexion and awarding first prize to the one wearing the cleanest suit. They may differ in appearance, but they share the same condition.

Sin’s wages include physical death, spiritual separation, and ultimately the second death for the unsaved. Revelation 20:14–15 says, “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.” The natural man is already “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1), alienated from the life of God, and under condemnation because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. His religious works do not reverse that death. A corpse cannot raise itself by practicing better posture. A dead sinner cannot produce spiritual life through sacraments, self-reformation, moral discipline, emotional sincerity, or ecclesiastical approval. Religion may paint the coffin, polish the handles, hang flowers around it, and issue a certificate declaring it improved, but the occupant remains dead until God gives life.

That is why eternal life must be given rather than earned. The sinner’s labor can only produce the wages associated with his fallen condition. Even his righteousnesses are “as filthy rags” before divine holiness (Isaiah 64:6). Human merit cannot climb out of Adam and into Christ. It cannot erase yesterday’s sins, impart the righteousness of God, regenerate the dead spirit, or place a man into the body of Christ. The law can identify guilt, stop the mouth, and make the whole world guilty before God, but “by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight” (Romans 3:20). The law is an honest mirror, not a bar of soap. It can show the mud on a man’s face, but rubbing his face against the glass will not clean him. Eternal life must come “through Jesus Christ our Lord” because Jesus Christ alone possesses the life, righteousness, and saving merit the sinner lacks.

2. Jesus Christ Paid the Entire Price at Calvary

The cross stands at the center of salvation because God’s holiness demanded satisfaction and man’s helplessness required a substitute. Jesus Christ “was delivered for our offences,

and was raised again for our justification” (Romans 4:25). The words “for our offences” leave no room for the modern notion that Christ merely died as a moral example, a political martyr, or an inspiring symbol of sacrificial love. He died in the sinner’s place. Second Corinthians 5:21 says, “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” The sinless Son of God took the sinner’s judicial place so that the believing sinner could receive His righteous standing. Salvation is not God pretending the sinner never sinned; it is God judging the sinner’s sins in the body of His Son and justifying the man who believes on Him.

The payment was made in blood. “Without shedding of blood is no remission” (Hebrews 9:22), and “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Peter says that redemption was not purchased “with corruptible things, as silver and gold,” but “with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18–19). Rome may display its gold, religion may parade its ceremonies, and moralists may polish their respectable reputations, but none of those things can buy one guilty soul out of the slave market of sin. The price was blood because the life of the flesh is in the blood and because divine justice required death. Christ did not carry symbolic guilt to a symbolic cross and shed metaphorical blood for imaginary sinners. He suffered in history, died in agony, was buried in a real tomb, and rose bodily from the dead. The gospel stands upon an accomplished event, not a religious mood.

When Christ cried, “It is finished,” He announced a completed transaction. Hebrews 10:12 says, “But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.” The Old Testament priest stood because his work was never finished; Christ sat down because His sacrifice required no addition. No mass can continue it, no baptism can complete it, no penance can supplement it, and no lifetime of obedience can improve it. If the sinner must contribute one saving work, then Christ’s work was not finished. If the believer must make the final payment through perseverance, then the cross was only a religious deposit. But if Christ offered “one sacrifice for sins for ever,” the sinner’s task is not to crawl onto the altar beside Him. His task is to believe. Religion keeps trying to help Christ finish salvation because religion would rather insult a completed cross than admit that human pride has nothing to contribute.

3. Grace and Works Cannot Share the Same Saving Contract

Romans 11:6 settles the relationship between grace and works with inspired arithmetic: “And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace.” God did not say that salvation is mostly grace with a manageable percentage of works. He declared the two principles mutually exclusive as grounds of acceptance. Grace gives what the recipient has not earned; works demand

what the worker believes he deserves. Grace places the glory upon the giver; works leave room for the laborer to boast. The moment human merit becomes part of the basis for salvation, grace stops being grace. Adding one ounce of works to saving grace is not spiritual balance. It is doctrinal contamination.

Ephesians 2:8–9 says, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” The passage blocks every exit through which human pride attempts to escape. Salvation is by grace, so man cannot claim merit. It is through faith, so man must receive what God provided. It is not of ourselves, so its source is not human. It is the gift of God, so it is not a wage. It is not of works, so religious performance contributes nothing to its purchase. Finally, boasting is excluded because God intends to receive all the glory. The flesh despises that arrangement. The drunkard wants credit for reforming, the churchman wants credit for attending, the ritualist wants credit for submitting, and the theologian wants credit for explaining why “not of works” actually means a special category of works approved by his denomination.

Romans 4:4–5 draws the same line: “Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” The text does not say that God justifies the improved, surrendered, baptized, persevering, church-certified, socially renovated godly man. He “justifieth the ungodly.” Nor does it say that faith becomes a meritorious work by which man earns salvation. The contrast is between working and believing. Faith abandons confidence in self and rests upon another Person’s work. A drowning man does not boast because he accepted the lifeline; the glory belongs to the rescuer who threw it and pulled him aboard. Faith is not the sinner helping Christ save him. It is the sinner ceasing to trust every supposed helper but Christ.

4. Repentance and Faith Must Remain in Their Biblical Place

Repentance is biblical, necessary, and repeatedly commanded, but religion commonly mishandles it by turning it into a schedule of preliminary works. Paul testified of “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21). Repentance turns the sinner’s mind and heart from his false confidence, rebellion, idols, and unbelief toward the God against whom he has sinned. Faith rests upon Jesus Christ as the only Saviour. These are not two unrelated payments placed into God’s hand. They describe the sinner’s response to the truth. When a man turns from confidence in himself and believes on Christ, he has not purchased salvation through the emotional intensity of his repentance. He has come to God empty-handed. Biblical repentance does not bring a suitcase of good works to Calvary; it drops the suitcase and admits that none of its contents can save.

Religion often defines repentance as cleaning up one's life sufficiently before God will receive him. Under that arrangement, the drunkard must stop drinking, the fornicator must reform his conduct, the thief must repair his reputation, and the churchgoing hypocrite must display enough outward improvement to prove sincerity before Christ will save him. Such reform may be desirable, necessary for restored relationships, and proper as fruit following conversion, but it cannot regenerate the sinner. A man may stop drinking and go to hell sober. He may abandon adultery and remain dead in Adam. He may return stolen goods and never receive the righteousness of Christ. Cornelius was devout, prayerful, charitable, and feared God, yet he still needed Peter to tell him words whereby he and his house would be saved (Acts 11:14). Moral movement is not the same thing as spiritual birth.

Faith must likewise be kept free from the religious additions men hide inside the word. Saving faith is not merely acknowledging that God exists, admiring Jesus as a teacher, or agreeing that Christianity contains useful principles. It is personal reliance upon the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work. Yet faith is not made genuine by attaching a wagonload of works to it and claiming the wagon proves the horse is alive. Scripture says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). John 6:47 says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." The object of faith gives faith its saving value. Weak faith in a strong Saviour saves because the Saviour is strong; strong faith in baptism, church membership, human merit, or religious sincerity cannot save because the object is false. Salvation does not depend upon the believer's ability to grip Christ with perfect strength, but upon Christ's ability to keep the one who has trusted Him.

5. Baptism and Church Membership Cannot Wash Away Sin

Water baptism is an important act of obedience and public identification, but water cannot accomplish what Scripture assigns to the blood of Christ. Paul declared, "Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel" (1 Corinthians 1:17). If water baptism were part of the saving gospel, that statement would make no sense. Paul could not have separated baptism from the gospel if baptism were one of the means by which the gospel saves. In 1 Corinthians 1:14–16, he even thanked God that he had baptized only a few of the Corinthians. No gospel preacher could thank God that he had administered the means of salvation to only a small number of his converts. Paul preached Christ crucified, and those who believed were saved; baptism followed as obedience and testimony.

Acts 10 supplies a troublesome passage for anyone attempting to make water the instrument of regeneration. Cornelius and his household heard the word, believed, and received the Holy Ghost before they were baptized in water. Peter said, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well

as we?” (Acts 10:47). The order is plain: they heard, believed, received the Holy Ghost, and then entered the water. Religion comes along centuries later, reverses the order, installs a faucet, dresses a clergyman in ceremonial robes, and insists that heaven cannot operate without proper plumbing. But the Holy Ghost had already entered those believers before one drop touched them. Water baptism pictures the believer’s identification with Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection; it does not transform municipal water into liquid blood.

Church membership is equally powerless to save. A local church is an assembly of believers, not a religious ark into which the clergy loads approved passengers before the flood. The Holy Spirit places the believer into the body of Christ: “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body” (1 Corinthians 12:13). Joining a congregation does not produce that spiritual operation. A man may belong to a Baptist church, Methodist church, Presbyterian church, Pentecostal church, Catholic church, or a church with “Bible” printed across the sign in letters large enough to frighten the traffic, and still remain lost. A name on the church roll is not a name in the book of life. Church membership provides fellowship, accountability, teaching, worship, service, and corporate testimony, but it cannot justify the ungodly. Sitting in a church does not make a man a Christian any more than sitting in a courthouse makes him a judge.

6. Endurance Surrender and Faithful Service Belong After Salvation

Endurance is a vital Christian virtue, but it must be placed in the proper doctrinal category. The believer is repeatedly commanded to endure hardness, remain steadfast, hold fast the faithful word, continue in service, and run with patience the race set before him. Those commands concern discipleship, testimony, usefulness, victory, and reward. They do not mean that eternal life becomes everlasting only after the believer has successfully reached the grave. If life can expire because the believer failed to endure, God used the wrong adjective when He called it “eternal” and “everlasting.” John 10:28 records Christ’s promise: “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” “Never perish” does not mean “perish if your endurance report falls below the denominational minimum.”

Passages about enduring must be interpreted by their context rather than scooped into a theological sack and dumped at the foot of the cross. Matthew 24:13—“he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved”—stands in a prophetic passage about deception, persecution, the abomination of desolation, flight from Judaea, and the great tribulation. It is not Paul’s gospel presentation to a Church Age sinner. Second Timothy 2:12–13 distinguishes reigning from the Lord’s faithfulness to His own: “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us”—the denial in context concerns the promised privilege—followed by, “If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he

cannot deny himself.” The believer is a member of Christ’s body. Christ cannot deny Himself. But the secure believer may lose reigning privilege through unfaithfulness. Right division does not erase warnings; it points them at the people and consequences God intended.

Surrender and faithful service are likewise consequences of salvation rather than contributions to its price. Romans 12:1 addresses men already called “brethren” and beseeches them “by the mercies of God” to present their bodies a living sacrifice. Paul did not command them to present their bodies so they could become brethren. He appealed to them as brethren because God’s mercies had already been shown. Ephesians 2:10 follows salvation by grace with the declaration that believers are “created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” Titus 3:8 instructs those “which have believed in God” to “be careful to maintain good works.” The order never changes: faith first, works afterward; birth first, growth afterward; salvation first, service afterward. A train’s caboose belongs on the tracks, but coupling it in front of the engine will not improve transportation.

7. The Gift Is Kept by the Giver and Not the Receiver

If eternal life is the gift of God, its security depends upon the faithfulness and power of the Giver. Jesus said of His sheep, “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish.” He then added, “neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand,” and declared that the Father is greater than all and that no man can pluck them out of His Father’s hand (John 10:28–29). The believer is not hanging over hell by the fingertips while Christ shouts advice from heaven. He is held in the hand of the Son, held in the hand of the Father, sealed by the Holy Spirit, and joined to Christ’s body. The entire Godhead is involved in his security. Religion places a frightened sinner between those divine hands and tells him that one missed confession, one spiritual failure, or one season of weakness may allow him to slip through. That system has a large devil, a slippery salvation, and a remarkably small God.

Ephesians 1:13–14 says that after believing the gospel, the believer is “sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession.” A seal signifies ownership, identification, security, and the completion of an authorized transaction. The Holy Spirit Himself is the earnest—the divine down payment and guarantee—of what God has promised. Ephesians 4:30 says believers are “sealed unto the day of redemption,” not sealed until the next serious failure.

Philippians 1:6 expresses confidence “that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” Salvation begins with God, continues under God’s keeping power, and reaches completion by God’s faithfulness. The believer may require chastening, correction, rebuke, and restoration of fellowship, but God does not abandon His purchased possession at the first sign of damage.

The security of salvation does not grant permission to sin. It establishes the relationship in which God deals with sin as a Father dealing with His children. Hebrews 12 teaches chastening, not repeated spiritual abortion. First Corinthians 11 shows believers becoming weak, sickly, and even dying under divine discipline so that they “should not be condemned with the world.” Galatians 6:7 warns, “whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” A saved man who sows to the flesh will reap corruption, damage his testimony, wound his family, lose usefulness, and face Christ with burned works. Grace does not cancel sowing and reaping; it prevents the believer’s failures from overturning Christ’s finished redemption. Eternal security is not God winking at sin. It is God refusing to let sin, Satan, or human weakness nullify the blood-bought relationship He established in His Son.

Conclusion

The gospel does not lead the sinner to a checkout counter. It leads him to a cross, an empty tomb, and a risen Saviour. At that cross the full price was paid; in that tomb death’s claim was answered; through that risen Saviour eternal life is given. “The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” The verse does not contain a baptismal fee, a church-membership surcharge, a surrender deposit, an endurance clause, or a service tax. Those who trust Jesus Christ receive the gift because God promised it on the basis of His Son’s work. Religion may wave its forms, display its robes, invoke its traditions, and rattle its collection plate, but it cannot improve the blood. Calvary does not need a cashier.

Repentance toward God and faith toward Jesus Christ belong in the sinner’s response to the gospel. Baptism, church fellowship, surrender, endurance, obedience, holiness, good works, and faithful service belong in the saved man’s walk. Rewards, crowns, inheritance, and reigning privilege belong to the believer’s future accounting before Christ. Every one of those truths matters, but they do not perform the same function. Placing discipleship requirements into the offer of eternal life corrupts grace. Removing discipleship and accountability from the Christian life produces carnality. Right division preserves both the freeness of the gospel and the seriousness of the believer’s calling. A gift can be free without being cheap, and a salvation can be secure without making the Christian life inconsequential.

Let God’s gift remain where God placed it—in the empty hand of faith. The sinner does not need a payment plan; he needs a Saviour. He does not need to promise that he will finish what Christ began; he needs to believe that Christ finished what he could never begin. Once saved, he should rise, obey, follow, labor, suffer, endure, and serve with all his might, not to purchase eternal life but because eternal life has already been purchased for him. The blood paid the price, grace offers the gift, faith receives it, the Holy Spirit seals it, and

God keeps His word. Religion can close the register, tear up the invoice, and remove the price tag. Jesus Christ already paid the bill.

3 of 10: Salvation Discipleship and Reward — Calvary's Cross and the Christian's Cross Are Not the Same Cross

Key Passage: Matthew 16:24–26

“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

Introduction

Two crosses appear in the preaching of the New Testament, but only one of them pays for sin. The first is the cross of Jesus Christ, where the sinless Son of God bore the sinner's guilt, endured the judgment of God, shed His precious blood, and finished the work of redemption. The second is the disciple's cross, which the believer willingly takes up when he denies himself and follows his rejected Lord through obedience, sacrifice, suffering, and loss. Calvary's cross is substitutionary; the Christian's cross is identificational. Christ's cross saves; the disciple's cross costs. Christ's cross is the ground of justification; the disciple's cross is the path of practical submission. The first concerns what Christ did alone for the sinner, while the second concerns what the saved man is willing to surrender for Christ. Mix those two crosses, and the gospel becomes a payment plan requiring the sinner to help finance his own redemption. Separate them completely in practical preaching, and discipleship becomes a padded pew where self sits comfortably beneath a decorative cross while singing about sacrifice.

The Lord Jesus Christ never told a sinner to help carry the weight of his own sins to Calvary. He carried that weight Himself. First Peter 2:24 says that Christ “his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree.” Isaiah 53:6 declares, “the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Second Corinthians 5:21 says that God “hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” The transaction was complete, exclusive, and sufficient. The sinner supplies the guilt; Christ supplies the righteousness. The sinner brings the debt; Christ makes the payment. The sinner deserves the judgment; Christ takes the judgment in his place. No amount of personal suffering,

religious surrender, self-denial, church loyalty, ceremonial observance, or moral improvement can be added to that sacrifice. A man cannot assist the Lamb of God by dragging his own little religious cross up the hill and asking where it should be installed.

Yet the same Lord who offers eternal life freely tells His disciples to deny themselves, take up their crosses, and follow Him. Those commands are not empty suggestions, poetic decorations, or material for sentimental hymns. Discipleship has a real cost because following Christ brings the believer into conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil. The man who follows a rejected Saviour should not expect the world that rejected Him to reserve a parade route. But the disciple does not bear his cross to become a son of God. He bears it because, having received the Son of God, he has become one of God's sons. John 1:12 says, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." Birth establishes the relationship; cross-bearing demonstrates the direction of the life that follows. A Christian carries his cross from a position of acceptance, not toward a possibility of acceptance.

1. Calvary's Cross Was the Saviour's Work Alone

The cross of Christ was first and foremost a substitutionary sacrifice. Jesus Christ did not die merely to display courage, protest injustice, inspire compassion, or provide humanity with a moving example of selfless love. He died "for our sins according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3). He "suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18). The preposition "for" carries the weight of substitution: the Just One in the place of the unjust, the sinless One in the place of sinners, the obedient Son beneath the judgment deserved by Adam's ruined race. Barabbas walked away because Christ occupied the condemned man's place, and in that historical exchange God hung a picture large enough for a blind theologian to see. The innocent One took the cross while the guilty man went free.

Isaiah 53 describes the divine transfer with relentless clarity: "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows"; "he was wounded for our transgressions"; "he was bruised for our iniquities"; "the chastisement of our peace was upon him"; and "with his stripes we are healed." The LORD made "his soul an offering for sin" and laid upon Him "the iniquity of us all." Nothing in that passage suggests a partnership between Christ and the sinner. God did the laying, Christ did the bearing, and the sinner receives the benefit through faith. Calvary was not a cooperative project in which heaven supplied the lumber, Christ supplied most of the blood, and religion supplied the finishing touches. God's salvation excludes human boasting because God's Son performed the work.

The exclusiveness of Christ's sacrifice is essential to the gospel. If the sinner's suffering contributes to his redemption, then Christ did not bear all his sins. If personal surrender helps pay the debt, then the blood did not satisfy the whole account. If sacraments complete the transaction, then "one sacrifice for sins for ever" in Hebrews 10:12 requires an asterisk supplied by the clergy. But Scripture says, "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:10). "Once for all" leaves neither space nor necessity for a second offering. The cross of Calvary stands alone because the Saviour who hung upon it stands alone. He does not divide His office with priests, rituals, reformers, disciples, or religious entrepreneurs who set up booths at the foot of the hill and charge admission to finished redemption.

2. The Blood Finished What Human Sacrifice Could Never Begin

Salvation required blood because God had declared, "without shedding of blood is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22). The blood of bulls and goats could never take away sins; those sacrifices pointed forward to the Lamb of God. John the Baptist did not introduce Christ by saying, "Behold the moral teacher who will help mankind discover its better self." He said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Christ was the spotless Lamb, foreordained before the foundation of the world, whose precious blood would accomplish what rivers of animal blood could only picture. Redemption is "through his blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:14). God's remedy for guilt is not human resolve but divine blood.

When Christ declared, "It is finished" (John 19:30), He was not announcing the end of His physical strength while leaving salvation unfinished. The atoning work had reached its appointed completion. Divine justice had been answered, prophecy fulfilled, the price paid, and the sufficient sacrifice offered. Hebrews 1:3 says that Christ, "when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." Notice the phrase "by himself." He did not purge most of our sins and leave the stubborn stains for baptismal water. He did not remove the early sins and leave future sins to be managed through religious maintenance. He purged our sins "by himself." Religion keeps volunteering as Calvary's cleanup crew, but heaven has issued no work permit.

The believer's sacrifices can never be placed beside Christ's sacrifice as though both possessed saving merit. Paul could present his body as a living sacrifice, endure stripes, imprisonment, hunger, cold, rejection, and eventually martyrdom, but none of that washed away one sin. His sufferings belonged to service and discipleship, not atonement. When he said, "I endure all things for the elect's sakes" (2 Timothy 2:10), he was speaking of gospel ministry, not purchasing their redemption. Only Christ could redeem because only Christ was sinless, only Christ was God manifest in the flesh, and only Christ bore divine wrath as

the appointed substitute. A thousand martyrs may die for the truth, but only one Lamb died for sin.

3. Sonship Comes by Faith Before Cross-Bearing Begins

The sinner becomes a son of God by receiving Jesus Christ. John 1:12–13 says, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” Spiritual birth does not occur through natural ancestry, human determination, religious sponsorship, or sacrificial performance. It occurs through faith in Christ by the operation of God. Galatians 3:26 confirms the truth: “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” The verse does not say that men become children of God by carrying their crosses successfully until death. Faith establishes sonship before the first mile of practical discipleship has been walked.

This order appears throughout Paul’s epistles. Romans establishes justification by faith before calling the justified believer to present his body as a living sacrifice in Romans 12. Ephesians first declares the believer saved by grace, raised with Christ, seated in heavenly places, accepted in the beloved, redeemed through Christ’s blood, and sealed with the Holy Spirit; only then does Paul beseech him to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called” (Ephesians 4:1). The calling precedes the worthy walk. Position comes before practice. God does not tell spiritually dead sinners to walk worthily until they generate enough life to be born. He gives life freely in Christ and then commands His children to walk in a manner consistent with the life they possess.

This distinction preserves both assurance and responsibility. If cross-bearing determines sonship, then assurance rises and falls with the believer’s daily performance. On Monday he denied himself and felt saved; on Tuesday he chose comfort and wondered whether he had become unborn; by Wednesday he needed a theologian to explain which degree of failure canceled eternal life. But Scripture anchors sonship in Christ, not in the Christian’s changing level of surrender. The believer may walk obediently or carnally, remain near his Father or wander into a far country, honor the family name or bring it reproach, but failure of conduct does not reverse the new birth. A disobedient son needs correction, confession, restoration, and chastening; he does not need to crawl back into the womb.

4. Self-Denial Is the Price of Discipleship Not Salvation

Jesus said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself” (Matthew 16:24). Self-denial is not merely refusing an extra slice of pie, giving up a harmless pleasure during a religious season, or enduring a minor inconvenience while making sure everyone hears about it. It is the repudiation of self as the ruling authority of the life. Self wants to decide

what is true, what is right, what is comfortable, what is profitable, and how far obedience may proceed before becoming unreasonable. Christ confronts that private throne and commands the disciple to vacate it. A man cannot follow Christ while continually insisting that Christ follow him. Two kings cannot occupy one throne, and Self has never surrendered the chair without a fight.

The flesh is willing to practice religion as long as religion leaves its sovereignty intact. It will attend church, sing hymns, study doctrine, argue prophecy, distribute tracts, and even preach sermons if those activities feed its pride. It will deny certain outward appetites while secretly enthroning its reputation. It will surrender possessions it never wanted and publicize sacrifices that cost little. Genuine self-denial reaches deeper. It submits personal ambition to God's calling, human opinion to Scripture, appetite to holiness, convenience to duty, and reputation to obedience. Paul said, "Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy" (Acts 20:24). He did not despise life; he refused to place self-preservation above his God-given course.

Yet self-denial cannot be turned into saving merit. No man has denied himself perfectly enough to earn the righteousness of God. Even the best disciple carries an old nature that must be reckoned dead day after day. If complete self-denial were a condition for receiving eternal life, every man would remain condemned, including the preacher imposing the condition. Salvation rests upon Christ's perfect obedience; discipleship involves the believer's imperfect but genuine response to that obedience. The Christian denies himself because Christ saved him, not so Christ might consider saving him. Grace does not wait at the end of successful self-denial; grace stands at the beginning and makes self-denial both possible and reasonable.

5. The Christian's Cross Is Chosen Obedience Beneath Reproach

Luke 9:23 records Christ's words: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." The word "daily" shows that Christian cross-bearing is not one dramatic moment surrounded by years of self-rule. It is a continuing disposition of obedience. The believer wakes each day in a world opposed to his Lord, carrying flesh that resists the Spirit, and facing a devil who prefers comfortable Christians to courageous ones. He must repeatedly choose whether Christ's word or personal convenience will govern him. The cross stands wherever obedience to Christ intersects with loss to self. Some days that loss is visible and severe; on others it is quiet, hidden, and known only to God.

Not every hardship is a Christian cross. A man's bad temper, foolish debts, reckless decisions, neglected health, or unnecessary quarrels may bring suffering, but suffering

caused by stupidity does not become discipleship merely because the sufferer owns a Bible. First Peter 2:20 asks, “For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently?” Peter then contrasts suffering for wrongdoing with suffering for well doing. First Peter 4:15 warns believers not to suffer as murderers, thieves, evildoers, or busybodies in other men’s matters, but adds, “Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed.” The Christian’s cross is connected with faithful identification with Christ, not the natural consequences of behaving like a sanctified nuisance.

The cross may involve rejection by family, ridicule from society, hostility from religious authorities, financial loss, loneliness, bodily suffering, or death. Paul bore in his body “the marks of the Lord Jesus” (Galatians 6:17) because his ministry carried him through beatings, prisons, stonings, shipwrecks, hunger, weariness, cold, and danger. He did not preach a gospel of personal comfort because the Lord who called him had been crucified outside the gate. Philippians 1:29 says, “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.” Believing and suffering are related, but they are distinguished. Believing brings salvation; suffering faithfully may accompany discipleship. The world has little objection to a cross worn as jewelry, but it still hates a cross lived as separation from its values.

6. Losing One’s Life for Christ Is an Investment Not a Payment

Christ said, “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 16:25). The man who lives entirely for self-preservation, earthly advantage, comfort, popularity, wealth, and worldly acceptance may preserve his temporary interests while losing the eternal value his life could have possessed. He may reach the end with full barns, clean hands, no scars, and nothing that survives Christ’s fire. The believer who loses his life for Christ’s sake does not purchase eternal life by the loss; he discovers the lasting value of a life invested in the will of God. The issue is not obtaining salvation but finding one’s life in the purpose for which the saved man was left on earth.

Paul understood this investment. He counted the things that had once been gain as loss for Christ and pressed toward the mark “for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14). He already possessed the righteousness of God by faith, but he had not yet finished his race or received his crown. Near the end he could say, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith,” and then look forward to “a crown of righteousness” (2 Timothy 4:7–8). The crown was not eternal life disguised in royal language. Eternal life had been his present possession for years. The crown was the righteous Judge’s reward for faithful completion of the course.

A Christian can save his earthly life and lose its reward, or lose earthly advantages and gain eternal treasure. Moses chose “rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season,” while “esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward” (Hebrews 11:25–26). Egypt could offer a palace, reputation, wealth, and immediate comfort. Faith looked beyond Egypt’s glitter to God’s recompense. The world calls that loss because the world owns a short ruler. Heaven measures beyond the grave. What a believer keeps from Christ will eventually be lost, while what he gives to Christ can never finally impoverish him.

7. Mixing the Two Crosses Corrupts Grace and Cheapens Discipleship

The first error makes the disciple’s cross part of the saving gospel. Under that system, a sinner must promise complete surrender, abandon every sin, forsake all possessions in heart, commit to lifelong obedience, and begin carrying a cross before Christ will grant him eternal life. The preacher may still use the words “grace” and “faith,” but he has packed those words with enough works to require a moving van. Such preaching shifts assurance from Christ’s finished work to the sinner’s uncertain surrender. The honest soul asks whether he surrendered enough, denied himself sincerely enough, or counted the cost thoroughly enough. The dishonest soul simply lowers the standard until his own performance qualifies. Either way, attention moves away from Christ and back to man.

The opposite error admits that salvation is free but treats discipleship as though it were equally costless. It promises heaven without hell, peace without warfare, crowns without running, reigning without suffering, and Christian maturity without a cross. Its Jesus exists to improve earthly circumstances, affirm personal ambitions, and bless whatever plan Self had already drafted. Sin becomes a mistake, holiness becomes extremism, separation becomes unloving, and sacrifice becomes a sign that someone has failed to claim sufficient prosperity. This is not grace; it is baptized selfishness. The cross is displayed above the platform while being carefully removed from the preaching lest anyone feel compelled to die to himself.

Biblical preaching guards both truths. It tells the sinner that Christ paid everything and that eternal life is received freely by faith. It then tells the believer, without apology, that following the One who saved him may cost everything this world calls valuable. The cost does not purchase sonship; it proves the seriousness of discipleship. The believer is not threatened with hell to make him obedient, nor is he bribed with worldly comfort to keep him interested. He is shown Calvary, reminded that he was bought with a price, and commanded to glorify God in his body and spirit. Grace saves a man for free, but it does not teach him to live cheaply.

Conclusion

Calvary's cross and the Christian's cross are not the same cross. Upon Calvary's cross, Jesus Christ bore sin, satisfied justice, shed the blood of redemption, defeated death, and completed the work necessary to save every sinner who believes. Upon the Christian's cross, the believer denies self-rule, accepts identification with a rejected Saviour, and follows Christ through whatever obedience may cost. Christ's cross is perfect; the disciple's cross-bearing is often imperfect. Christ's cross secures eternal life; the disciple's cross concerns fellowship, usefulness, testimony, spiritual fruit, and reward. The first must never be diluted by human contribution, and the second must never be dismissed by comfortable Christianity.

The believer does not climb Calvary beside Christ and offer God a shared sacrifice. He comes to Calvary as the guilty man for whom Christ died. He believes the gospel, receives eternal life, is born into God's family, sealed by the Holy Spirit, and accepted in the beloved. Then the saved man hears the voice of his Saviour: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." That is not the voice of a merchant negotiating salvation's price. It is the voice of a Master calling His blood-bought servant away from self-rule and into faithful service.

Let no religious system attach the Christian's suffering to Christ's payment, and let no careless believer use Christ's payment as an excuse to avoid Christian suffering. The blood alone redeems, but the redeemed man should be willing to bear reproach for the One whose blood redeemed him. Calvary settles where the believer will spend eternity; cross-bearing helps determine what his life will amount to when he arrives there. One cross is finished, while the other must be taken up daily. One cross saved us from hell; the other teaches us not to waste the life that was saved. Christ bore His cross because we could not. We bear ours because He did.

4 of 10: Salvation Discipleship and Reward — Losing Your Life Without Losing Eternal Life

Key Passage: Matthew 16:24–27

"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his

soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.”

Introduction

Religion has a remarkable talent for taking every warning in the Bible and turning it into the same threat. If Christ warns a disciple about wasting his life, religion says he is about to lose eternal life. If Paul warns a servant about losing reward, religion opens the trapdoor to hell. If Scripture warns a son about chastening, religion declares that the Father is preparing adoption papers in reverse. The doctrinal machinery is simple: ignore the audience, flatten the context, erase every distinction between salvation, discipleship, fellowship, inheritance, and reward, and then tell the frightened believer that one sufficiently serious failure will undo the blood, break the seal of the Holy Spirit, tear him out of Christ’s body, reverse the new birth, and make Jesus Christ a liar. That is not reverence for biblical warnings. It is doctrinal vandalism performed by men who paint every warning sign red because they never learned to read what the sign actually says.

Matthew 16 does not begin with Christ negotiating the price of eternal life with an unsaved man. It says, “Then said Jesus unto his disciples.” The men being addressed had been called, had followed Him, and had just heard Peter confess, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). Christ then began to reveal His coming suffering, death, and resurrection. Peter objected to the cross, and the Lord rebuked the satanic thinking behind his objection. It is in that setting that Christ speaks about self-denial, cross-bearing, following, saving one’s life, losing one’s life, and the coming reward “according to his works.” The passage is about the cost and consequence of discipleship in the shadow of Christ’s rejection. It is not an installment agreement for receiving everlasting life. The words “follow me” concern the disciple’s course, and the words “reward every man according to his works” concern the coming accounting. Religion reads a passage about following and reward and somehow finds a baptismal tank, a membership card, and a temporary salvation policy hidden between the lines.

The believer can lose his earthly life without losing the eternal life God gave him, and he can preserve his earthly comfort while losing the eternal value that life might have produced. He may surrender reputation, security, possessions, ambitions, relationships, freedom, health, and even physical life for Christ’s sake, yet discover at the Judgment Seat that nothing placed into Christ’s hands was finally lost. On the other hand, he may protect himself from every inconvenience, avoid every reproach, bury every talent, refuse every cross, and reach the end of his days with a life carefully preserved and eternally wasted. Eternal security does not make such waste impossible; it makes it more tragic. A lost man wastes the life he received through natural birth, but a careless Christian wastes a life that

was purchased by the blood of God's own Son. The issue is not whether Christ can keep what He saved. The issue is whether the saved man will give Christ anything worth keeping when the fire tries his work.

1. The Context Concerns Discipleship and Coming Reward

The first rule of honest Bible study is to allow a passage to say what it says to the people to whom it says it. Matthew 16:24 identifies the audience as disciples and the subject as coming after Christ. The Lord says, "If any man will come after me," not, "If any sinner wishes to receive everlasting life." He then names the demands of discipleship: deny self, take up the cross, and follow. Verse 27 carries the subject forward to His return, when "he shall reward every man according to his works." Salvation by grace is not a reward according to works. Romans 4:4 says, "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt," while Ephesians 2:8 calls salvation "the gift of God." If Matthew 16:27 were teaching that eternal life is awarded according to works, Paul's gospel would have to be buried beside every theological system that ever tried to reconcile a gift with a paycheck.

The phrase "save his life" in verse 25 must therefore be read in connection with self-preservation and discipleship. A disciple may attempt to save his earthly life by avoiding the reproach, suffering, danger, and sacrifice that accompany following a rejected Christ. Peter had just tried to remove the cross from Christ's path, saying, "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee" (Matthew 16:22). The Lord's rebuke exposed the earthly reasoning behind Peter's protest: "thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." Men naturally prefer crowns without crosses, kingdoms without rejection, and glory without suffering. Christ answered that satanic shortcut by declaring that anyone coming after Him must accept the very principle Peter had resisted. The disciple who spends his life fleeing every cross may preserve his skin while bankrupting his service.

Verse 26 then widens the warning: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" The value of the soul towers above every possession the world can offer. No man, saved or lost, can trade away eternal realities without proving himself a fool. For the unsaved man, gaining the world while dying without Christ ends in eternal ruin. For the disciple in the immediate context, the question also exposes the insanity of exchanging a life of eternal consequence for temporary advantage. The world offers shiny trinkets on a sinking ship. Its promotions expire, its applause changes direction, its treasures rust, and its kingdoms pass into other hands. A man who barter away truth, obedience, and his appointed course to gain this present world has traded diamonds for carnival tickets and congratulated himself because the tickets were brightly colored.

2. Eternal Life Is Christ's Gift and Christ's Possession

Eternal life is not a temporary arrangement maintained by the believer's successful discipleship. Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life" (John 6:47). The believer "hath" it as a present possession, and its character is everlasting. John 5:24 adds that he "shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." The passage does not say that he is slowly passing, conditionally passing, or temporarily visiting life until his next spiritual failure. He "is passed." Salvation changes the believer's standing before God because the righteousness of Jesus Christ is placed to his account. His security rests upon Christ's merit, not upon the uninterrupted excellence of his walk. If eternal life can end, it was misnamed; if everlasting life can expire, the dictionary needs a theologian to help it lie.

John 10:28–29 gives the Shepherd's promise: "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." Christ does not say, "I lend unto them eternal life while they keep up their end of the arrangement." He says, "I give." He does not say that most will avoid perishing if they carry their crosses faithfully enough. He says, "they shall never perish." The believer is held in the Son's hand and the Father's hand, sealed by the Holy Spirit "unto the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30), and joined to Christ as a member of His body. For a believer to lose eternal life, somebody would have to break the Father's grip, overpower the Son, unseal the Spirit, remove a member from Christ's body, and teach God how to perform a second birth backward. Religion promises to accomplish all of that with one badly interpreted warning passage and a worried look.

Colossians 3:3 states, "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." The believer's eternal life is not hidden in his emotional stability, practical consistency, church attendance, theological vocabulary, or ability to endure persecution. It is hidden "with Christ in God." First John 5:11–12 declares, "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life." Eternal life is inseparable from the Son who possesses it. The believer's earthly course may be damaged, his fellowship broken, his testimony ruined, and his reward diminished, but Christ does not cease to be his life whenever his walk becomes unworthy. God's gift is safer in Christ than anything entrusted to human hands. The Christian may fumble his stewardship, but Christ does not fumble His sheep.

3. A Believer Can Save His Comfort and Waste His Calling

A Christian may spend his earthly life avoiding every demand that would disturb his comfort. He may refuse to speak because silence protects his reputation, refuse to give

because generosity threatens his savings, refuse to separate because compromise preserves his friendships, and refuse to serve because service interferes with leisure. He may call caution “wisdom,” fear “discernment,” selfishness “stewardship,” and inactivity “waiting on the Lord.” The flesh owns a large religious vocabulary for avoiding obedience. It can build a doctrinal foxhole, decorate it with prophecy charts, stock it with commentaries, and remain safely hidden while somebody else fights the battle. Such a believer may successfully save the life he wanted—the easy life, the admired life, the undisturbed life—and lose the life God called him to live.

Paul warned Timothy about Demas, “For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world” (2 Timothy 4:10). The verse does not say that Demas became unborn or that Christ’s blood ceased to cover him. It says he forsook Paul because he loved the present world. Demas chose the visible and immediate over the costly path of gospel ministry. Perhaps he preferred a bed to a prison floor, social acceptance to association with a condemned apostle, and personal safety to the reproach surrounding Paul’s chains. Whatever the precise details, the diagnosis is inspired: he “loved this present world.” The world rarely needs to persuade a Christian to deny every doctrine; sometimes it need only offer him a more comfortable place to sit while the battle passes by.

First Corinthians 3:15 reveals how severe a wasted Christian life can be: “If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” There stands a saved man surrounded by the ashes of his labor. His foundation is Jesus Christ, so he remains saved, but what he built upon that foundation does not survive. Eternal security did not convert his wood, hay, and stubble into gold, silver, and precious stones. Grace kept the man, but grace did not reward worthless work. The most frightening picture of a wasted Christian life is not a believer falling into hell; it is a believer standing securely in heaven with nothing to show Christ for the years purchased by His blood.

4. Losing One’s Life for Christ Is Finding Its Eternal Purpose

Christ said, “whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 16:25). The words “for my sake” are essential. Men lose their lives for foolish causes, political idols, personal pride, criminal ambitions, and earthly kingdoms that soon replace their monuments with parking lots. Such loss carries no automatic spiritual value. The promise belongs to the disciple who surrenders life for Christ’s sake. He yields his plans to Christ’s calling, his reputation to Christ’s truth, his possessions to Christ’s service, and his safety to Christ’s will. He does not despise life; he places it into the hands of the One who gave it. A life held tightly for self shrinks to the size of self, but a life surrendered to Christ enters purposes larger than the grave.

Paul embodied that surrender when he said, “But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy” (Acts 20:24). Bonds and afflictions awaited him, yet he valued finishing his course above preserving his comfort. He did not treat suffering as a payment toward salvation, for he already knew whom he had believed and was persuaded that Christ could keep what he had committed unto Him. His willingness to suffer concerned the course entrusted to him. He wanted to “testify the gospel of the grace of God,” and he refused to make his bodily safety the lord of his ministry. A man who counts his life too dear will eventually find obedience too expensive.

Philippians 1:20–21 gives the same perspective: “so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Death could be gain only because Paul already possessed eternal life in Christ. His execution would not purchase entrance into heaven; it would bring him into the presence of the Saviour he served. Therefore he could invest his remaining days without treating the Roman sword as the final authority over his future. The world controls men by threatening to take what they believe they cannot afford to lose. Once a Christian understands that his life is Christ and death is gain, Caesar discovers that his sharpest sword has become a doorway.

5. Denying Christ Can Bring Loss Without Reversing the New Birth

Second Timothy 2:11–13 contains one of the passages religion frequently shakes over the believer like a loaded pistol: “If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.” The context places suffering beside reigning. If we suffer, we reign; if we deny Him, He denies us the corresponding privilege. The passage concerns association, faithfulness, suffering, and reigning responsibility. It does not say that Christ will deny the believer’s membership in His body, because the next verse says that even when “we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.” The believer is joined to Christ, and Christ cannot amputate His own body to make a warning more dramatic.

Peter provides the most obvious example of a disciple denying the Lord without losing eternal life. He denied Christ three times, added oaths to his denial, and then wept bitterly. His failure was shameful, public, and serious. Yet before the denial Christ had said, “I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:32). Christ anticipated Peter’s fall, interceded for him, and spoke of his restoration. After the resurrection, the Lord did not tell Peter to get saved again. He dealt with Peter’s love, loyalty, and service: “Lovest thou me?” and “Feed my sheep” (John 21).

Peter's denial damaged his fellowship, broke his confidence, and required restoration, but it did not reverse his relationship.

A believer's denial can still carry grave consequences. Christ may deny him an opportunity, a stewardship, a crown, a place of reigning service, or the public commendation that could have been his. Second John 8 warns, "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward." Revelation 3:11 says, "hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." A crown can be forfeited without the believer being cast into the lake of fire. Religion seems unable to imagine any loss except hell, as though God possesses only two tools in His courtroom—a harp and a furnace. Scripture presents chastening, shame, forfeiture, rebuke, loss of reward, and diminished reigning privilege while preserving the believer's eternal standing in Christ.

6. The Judgment Seat Measures What the Saved Life Became

Second Corinthians 5:10 declares, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." Paul includes himself and all believers in the word "we." The purpose is "that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." This is not the Great White Throne Judgment of the unsaved dead in Revelation 20. The believer's eternal condemnation was settled when Christ bore his sins at Calvary, and Romans 8:1 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Nevertheless, the saved man must answer for the use of his body, time, opportunities, abilities, resources, influence, and calling. Salvation removes condemnation; it does not remove examination.

First Corinthians 3 says that the fire "shall try every man's work of what sort it is." The question is not merely how much work was performed but what kind it was. Men measure size, noise, attendance, income, popularity, titles, applause, and visible activity. Christ measures faithfulness, truth, motive, obedience, sacrifice, and spiritual substance. A sermon preached to magnify the preacher may burn while an unseen act of service performed for Christ survives. A ministry built through envy and strife may appear successful on earth and smell like burning hay in heaven. One hour of costly obedience may outweigh years of religious motion produced by pride. Men count the crowd; Christ weighs the heart.

The Judgment Seat proves why wasting a secure salvation is so tragic. The careless believer cannot lose Christ, but he can lose what might have been presented to Christ. He cannot be cast out of God's family, but he can arrive as an unprofitable servant. He cannot lose eternal life, but he can lose the crown associated with faithful labor. First Corinthians 4:5 says that the Lord "will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest

the counsels of the hearts.” Every hidden compromise, buried talent, abandoned assignment, secret motive, and unused opportunity will be seen beneath perfect light. Grace guarantees that the believer will stand there as a saved man; wisdom demands that he not stand there as a saved fool.

7. The Secure Believer Must Invest His Temporary Life Wisely

Eternal security should produce courageous service rather than careless living. Because the believer’s future is secure in Christ, he can afford to risk earthly comfort for eternal purpose. He can speak truth when truth costs approval, give when giving costs convenience, serve when service costs rest, and stand when standing costs companionship. Hebrews 10:34 describes believers who “took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.” They could surrender earthly possessions because they possessed an enduring inheritance beyond the reach of thieves and persecutors. Faith does not make a man careless with what God gives; it frees him from worshipping what cannot last.

The Christian should evaluate every earthly gain beneath the light of Christ’s return. Moses refused to identify permanently with Pharaoh’s palace, “choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Hebrews 11:25). He esteemed “the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward” (verse 26). Egypt offered immediate wealth, visible power, and cultural prestige. Faith looked beyond the palace walls and saw God’s accounting. Moses lost Egypt and found his appointed life. Pharaoh kept Egypt and lost everything beneath the waters. The world calls a man successful while the orchestra is playing; God waits until the curtain falls before announcing the verdict.

Paul therefore commands, “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15–16). Time cannot be stored, recovered, or repurchased once spent. Every day moves from stewardship into record. The Christian who says he will serve God later is writing checks against an account whose balance he has never seen. James says life “is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:14). A vapour is brief, but a life placed in Christ’s hands can produce fruit that outlives the stars. The tragedy is not that life is short; the tragedy is spending a short life on things with an even shorter future.

Conclusion

A believer can lose his earthly life without losing eternal life because the two are not identical. Earthly life is temporary, vulnerable, and entrusted to the Christian as a stewardship. Eternal life is the gift of God, possessed in Jesus Christ, secured by His

promise, and kept by His power. The first can be surrendered in service; the second cannot be canceled by failure. The first may be wasted through selfishness; the second remains hidden with Christ in God. Christ does not warn His disciples about losing their earthly lives because His saving power is weak. He warns them because their temporary lives are valuable and their opportunities will not return.

The disciple who gives his life to Christ loses nothing worth keeping. He may lose the world's approval, but he gains Christ's commendation. He may lose possessions, but he lays up treasure in heaven. He may lose comfort, but he shares the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. He may lose opportunities for earthly promotion, but he seeks an incorruptible crown. He may even lose physical life, yet death merely brings him into the presence of the Lord. The world sees the surrender and calls it waste; heaven sees the investment and calls it faithfulness. Mary broke the alabaster box, Judas complained about the expense, and Christ said, "She hath wrought a good work on me" (Mark 14:6). Hell always keeps an accountant nearby to explain why devotion to Christ costs too much.

The secure believer faces a choice, not between heaven and hell, but between a life invested and a life wasted. He may preserve himself, protect his comfort, avoid the cross, and watch his carefully guarded years burn as stubble before Christ. Or he may deny himself, take up his cross, follow the rejected Saviour, and discover that everything surrendered for Christ's sake has entered the keeping of eternity. Eternal security is not permission to waste life; it is freedom to spend life without fear. Christ will keep the soul He saved. The question is whether the saved man will keep clutching a temporary life until there is nothing left in his hands but ashes.

5 of 10: Salvation Discipleship and Reward — Good Works Belong in the Workshop Not the Maternity Ward

Key Passage: Ephesians 2:8–10

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

Introduction

Religion has never learned where to put good works. It drags them into the maternity ward and orders them to assist with the new birth, as though a dead sinner could deliver himself by pushing hard enough against the law. Then careless Christianity reacts against that error

by throwing works out of the workshop altogether, leaving the saved man spiritually unemployed, doctrinally overweight, and practically useless. One crowd teaches that sinners are born again by working; the other behaves as though Christians were born again to avoid working. The King James Bible corrects both errors in three consecutive verses. Ephesians 2:8 says salvation is by grace through faith and “not of yourselves.” Verse 9 says it is “Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Verse 10 then says the saved are God’s “workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” The order is inspired, exact, and fatal to every religious system that rearranges it. Grace saves the sinner without his works, and then God sends the saved sinner to work.

A man is not saved by good works, kept saved by good works, or progressively made acceptable to God through good works. The believer is accepted “in the beloved” (Ephesians 1:6), justified freely by God’s grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, and made the righteousness of God in Christ. No human deed can improve the righteousness of the sinless Son of God. You cannot polish perfection, strengthen omnipotence, or add a decorative religious wing to a finished mansion. Christ’s righteousness is not the first layer of a garment that the believer must finish sewing through obedience. It is the complete robe placed upon the believing sinner by grace. Good works cannot establish that standing, but they ought to grow out of it. The root is Christ; the fruit appears in the Christian’s walk. Fruit does not produce the tree, but a living tree that never bears anything deserves serious examination.

The New Testament gives works a vital place without giving them a saving place. Good works glorify God, benefit men, adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, demonstrate the reality of professed faith, preserve a useful testimony, meet genuine needs, and receive reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Evil works grieve the Holy Spirit, injure others, invite chastening, damage fellowship, corrupt testimony, and burn in the coming fire. The believer’s works matter greatly, but they do not perform the same function as the blood of Christ. The blood redeems; works serve. The blood justifies; works testify. The blood establishes sonship; works display obedience. The blood secures eternal life; works affect reward. Religion creates confusion by handing a hammer to the obstetrician and a baby blanket to the carpenter. God puts birth in the maternity ward and labor in the workshop.

1. The New Birth Is God’s Operation and Not Man’s Achievement

Jesus told Nicodemus, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Nicodemus immediately thought in physical terms and asked whether a man could enter the second time into his mother’s womb. Christ explained that “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (verse 6). Flesh cannot manufacture spiritual birth because flesh reproduces only flesh. Education can refine the

flesh, discipline can restrain it, religion can dress it, and culture can teach it which fork to use at dinner, but flesh remains flesh. The natural man is dead in trespasses and sins, alienated from the life of God, and incapable of giving himself spiritual life. A corpse may be embalmed, dressed, powdered, and placed beneath flattering lights, but none of that makes him breathe.

John 1:12–13 describes those who receive Christ and become sons of God, “Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” The new birth does not come through bloodline, religious ancestry, parental faith, human determination, clerical authority, or personal achievement. It is “of God.” First Peter 1:23 says believers are “born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God.” The Holy Spirit uses the incorruptible word to bring life when the sinner believes the gospel. No preacher, priest, parent, church, ordinance, or moral improvement can perform that operation. Men may present the word and preach Christ, but God gives the increase. The delivery room belongs to heaven.

Titus 3:5 states the matter without leaving a crack through which religious pride can crawl: “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.” Paul does not merely exclude evil works; he excludes “works of righteousness.” Even the best deeds performed by fallen men cannot regenerate the dead spirit or erase the judicial record of sin. Salvation comes through God’s mercy, “by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” Regeneration is not moral renovation. God does not repair Adam’s old house, replace a few rotten boards, and declare the structure new. He gives life in Christ and makes the believer a new creature. The sinner does not become born again because he turned over a new leaf; he becomes born again because God planted a new life.

2. Ephesians Places Grace Before Works and Works After Grace

Ephesians 2:8 begins with the settled statement, “For by grace are ye saved through faith.” Grace describes the source and principle of salvation; faith is the means by which the sinner receives what grace supplies. Salvation is not produced by faith as though faith itself possessed saving power. The Saviour saves; faith rests upon Him. A man crossing a bridge is not held above the river by confidence in his confidence but by the strength of the bridge. Weak faith in the mighty Christ saves, while strong faith in baptism, sacraments, church membership, human merit, or religious sincerity leaves a man resting on rotten timber. The value of faith lies in its object.

Paul then closes the door on human merit: “and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” If salvation came partly through man’s effort,

heaven would become a banquet hall filled with fleshly speeches. One man would boast of his baptism, another of his endurance, another of his charitable giving, another of his moral reform, and another of having selected the correct religious organization. God designed salvation so that every crown rests before the Lamb and every redeemed voice sings of His blood. No sinner will walk through the gates of pearl, point to the throne, and announce that Christ handled the difficult portion while he took care of the finishing work.

Verse 10 then restores works to their proper place: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” The believer is God’s workmanship before he performs the works God ordained. He is created “in Christ Jesus” and then directed “unto good works.” Good works are not the material from which the new creature is made; they are the appointed occupation of the new creature. Paul adds that God ordained “that we should walk in them.” The word “should” expresses divine purpose and moral responsibility without turning obedience into the basis of sonship. A saved man should work, walk worthily, bear fruit, and glorify God, but his failures do not make Christ’s workmanship become the devil’s property. The workmanship comes before the workshop.

3. The Deeds of the Law Cannot Justify a Sinner

Romans 3:20 says, “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight.” The law reveals sin but cannot remove it. “By the law is the knowledge of sin.” A thermometer can reveal a fever, but swallowing the thermometer will not cure the disease. God’s law exposes covetousness, lust, dishonesty, idolatry, blasphemy, hatred, and rebellion. It stops every mouth and makes the whole world guilty before God. That is holy and necessary work, but it is not saving work. The mirror is doing its job when it shows dirt on a man’s face; the fool is the man who becomes angry because the mirror refuses to wash him.

Galatians 2:16 repeats the verdict three times in one verse: “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law,” then, “not by the works of the law,” and finally, “for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” God apparently knew a religious man would need the sentence nailed down at both ends and driven through the middle. Justification comes “by the faith of Jesus Christ.” Christ obeyed perfectly, died substitutionally, rose victoriously, and provides righteousness freely to the believer. The law demands perfection from the man under it, and one violation makes him guilty. James 2:10 says, “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” The law is a pane of glass, not a row of fence posts. Break one place, and the pane is broken.

Romans 4:5 identifies the kind of man God justifies: “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly.” God does not justify the man who finally

worked himself into godliness and then became eligible for grace. He justifies the ungodly believer. Faith is counted for righteousness because faith receives Christ, and Christ is the believer's righteousness. Romans 10:4 says, "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." Christ does not help the sinner climb the ladder of law; He ends that ladder as the ground of righteousness. Religion keeps leaning the ladder against Calvary, but God keeps knocking it down with Romans.

4. Good Works Are the Expected Fruit of a Saved Life

The exclusion of works from justification does not exclude them from Christian conduct. Titus 2:14 says Christ "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Redemption comes first, followed by purification and zeal in service. Christ did not redeem a people so they could become experts in explaining why obedience is unnecessary. He saved them from sin and claimed them for Himself. The grace that brings salvation also teaches believers to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live "soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2:12). Grace is not God lowering the standard of holiness. Grace is God saving the helpless sinner and then teaching His child to walk differently.

Titus repeatedly presses this practical responsibility. Titus 3:8 says, "they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works." Believing comes before maintaining, but maintaining should follow believing. Verse 14 adds, "And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful." Good works must be learned, maintained, and directed toward genuine need. Christian service is not aimless religious motion designed to keep congregations busy. It should minister to people, support truth, relieve distress, strengthen churches, provide for families, advance the gospel, and adorn sound doctrine. A workshop that produces nothing but sawdust may be noisy, but it is not productive.

Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Good works do not make God the believer's Father; they cause men to glorify the Father he already has. First Peter 2:12 likewise tells believers to maintain honest conduct among the Gentiles so that those who speak against them may, by their good works, glorify God. The world cannot see justification placed to the believer's account in heaven, but it can see honesty, charity, purity, courage, faithfulness, patience, and sacrificial service on earth. Works are not the foundation of salvation, but they are part of salvation's public testimony. An invisible faith may be real before God, but if it remains permanently invisible before men, it is no testimony at all.

5. James and Paul Are Not Fighting Over Abraham's Soul

James 2:24 says, "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." Religion grabs that verse, runs past Romans without looking both ways, and announces that Paul has been overruled. Yet James begins his epistle "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (James 1:1), while Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles and the chief revealer of Church Age doctrine. Right division recognizes the dispensational setting without pretending James contains no application for Christians. More importantly, James and Paul address different aspects of justification. Paul explains how an ungodly sinner is justified before God; James explains how professed faith is shown, vindicated, and made visible through action. Paul fights works offered as the cause of salvation. James fights a barren profession that talks about faith while producing nothing.

Both writers use Abraham, but they point to different events in his life. Paul cites Genesis 15:6: "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness" (Romans 4:3). That occurred before circumcision and years before Isaac was offered upon the altar. James cites Genesis 22, asking, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" Abraham was already counted righteous by faith before Isaac was born. His later obedience did not retroactively purchase the righteousness he had already received. It demonstrated, matured, and fulfilled the faith he possessed. James says, "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?" The word "seest" concerns visible evidence. God saw Abraham's faith in Genesis 15; men can see its character displayed in Genesis 22.

Rahab gives the second illustration. She believed that the LORD had given Israel the land and confessed, "the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath" (Joshua 2:11). Her works followed that conviction when she received the messengers and sent them out another way. Her works did not replace faith; they acted upon it. James's challenge is directed against the man who says he has faith while refusing to clothe the naked, feed the hungry, or obey God. "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works?" (James 2:14). The issue is a man's claim—what he "say" he has—and the usefulness of a faith that remains alone. Paul removes works from salvation's root; James demands works in salvation's fruit. Only a poor gardener would call that a contradiction.

6. Works Will Be Tested for Quality and Motive

First Corinthians 3:11 identifies the only foundation: "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Salvation rests upon Christ. Paul then describes what believers build upon that foundation: "gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay,

stubble.” Those materials picture works of differing quality and durability. Gold, silver, and precious stones endure fire, while wood, hay, and stubble become smoke. The Judgment Seat does not determine whether the believer has the foundation; it examines what he built upon it. A man can be perfectly secure upon Christ while constructing a lifetime of flammable religious rubbish overhead.

The fire will try “every man’s work of what sort it is” (1 Corinthians 3:13). Christ is not impressed by the size of the pile. Men count crowds, dollars, buildings, books, broadcasts, baptisms, titles, followers, and public recognition. The fire asks what sort the work was. Was it true to Scripture? Was it performed in obedience? Did it magnify Christ or advertise the worker? Was it accomplished through charity or driven by envy, competition, guilt, vanity, fear, and self-promotion? First Corinthians 4:5 says the Lord “will make manifest the counsels of the hearts.” Heaven’s inspection reaches the motive beneath the action. Two men may perform the same outward deed while building with different materials.

The consequences are real: “If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.” Conversely, “If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” (1 Corinthians 3:14–15). Works earn reward, but they do not earn salvation. Bad works produce loss, but they do not reverse the new birth. The distinction could hardly be clearer if Paul had engraved it into a brass plate and bolted it to the church door. Religion still wanders past the words “he himself shall be saved” and insists that burning works must mean a burning believer. The Bible says the work burns, the man suffers loss, and the man remains saved. The workshop will be inspected, but the maternity record will not be rewritten.

7. The Christian Must Get to Work Without Trusting His Work

The believer’s first responsibility is to present himself to God. Romans 12:1 says, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice.” Paul appeals to men already identified as brethren and bases the appeal upon mercies already received. The body belongs to God because it was bought with a price. Therefore, the Christian’s eyes, ears, tongue, hands, feet, strength, time, abilities, possessions, and opportunities should become instruments of righteousness. Good works begin with availability. God does not require every believer to possess the same gift, occupy the same office, or perform the same assignment, but He does require each member to function faithfully where He placed him.

Christian labor must be rooted in truth and governed by charity. First Corinthians 13 warns that a man may speak with impressive tongues, possess knowledge, understand mysteries, give away his goods, and even surrender his body to be burned, yet profit nothing without

charity. Activity alone is not spirituality. A religious machine can produce enormous motion while grinding people beneath its gears. Sound service ministers according to Scripture, seeks the good of others, refuses hypocrisy, and gives Christ the glory. Colossians 3:23 commands, "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men." Work done merely for human praise has already selected an audience too small for eternity.

The Christian must therefore labor diligently without placing one ounce of saving confidence in his labor. Paul said, "But by the grace of God I am what I am," and then added, "I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Corinthians 15:10). Grace did not make Paul idle; it made him fruitful. Yet his labor never became a rival to grace because he recognized grace as its source. The believer works from salvation, not toward it; because he is accepted, not to become accepted; in the strength God supplies, not to manufacture spiritual life. He enters the workshop wearing the righteousness of Christ and leaves every finished piece at the Master's feet.

Conclusion

Good works belong in the workshop, not the maternity ward. The sinner is born again by the word of God through faith in Jesus Christ, according to divine mercy and apart from works of righteousness. His new birth is God's operation, his justification rests upon Christ's blood, and his acceptance is found in the beloved Son. No baptism, church membership, moral reform, charitable deed, religious ceremony, act of surrender, or lifetime of service can help produce that birth. The child does not assist in generating his own life. He receives life, and then life begins to act.

Once saved, however, the believer is not assigned to a rocking chair until the Rapture. He is God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works. He is to walk worthily, maintain good works, meet necessary uses, bear fruit, adorn sound doctrine, shine before men, support gospel ministry, care for his household, serve the saints, relieve suffering, defend truth, resist sin, and fulfill his appointed course. His works cannot purchase heaven, but they can glorify the God of heaven. They cannot make him a son, but they can honor his Father. They cannot secure eternal life, but they can receive eternal reward. Grace gives the believer a life that works while forbidding him to trust the works that life produces.

The two errors must therefore be rejected together. Legalism drags tools into the delivery room and demands that the dead sinner build himself alive. Careless Christianity locks the workshop after the new birth and tells God's workmanship to admire its warranty. The Bible permits neither absurdity. Salvation is "not of works," yet the saved are created "unto good works." Faith alone receives Christ, but the faith that receives Christ should not remain

alone in its effects. The blood supplies the birth, the Spirit supplies the power, the word supplies the pattern, and the Judgment Seat will inspect the workmanship. No Christian will work his way into heaven, but every Christian should work as a man who is already going there.

6 of 10: Salvation Discipleship and Reward — The Throne Has a Fellowship the Pew Never Promised

Key Passage: Romans 8:16–18

“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

Introduction

The modern religious pew has promised almost everything except what the Bible promises. It offers comfort without conflict, promotion without preparation, crowns without crosses, and a throne for every man who learned how to sit through a sermon without falling asleep conspicuously. In that padded arrangement, every believer is assumed to receive the same honor, the same authority, the same inheritance, the same commendation, and the same reigning position regardless of whether he suffered faithfully, served sacrificially, endured hardness, or spent his Christian life polishing the seat of his trousers. Religion on the opposite side of the ditch makes suffering part of the payment for eternal life, as though Christ shed most of the blood but left one corner of the receipt unpaid for the believer to settle through persecution. Both errors confuse salvation, discipleship, inheritance, and reward. One corrupts grace; the other cheapens glory.

Romans 8:16–17 places the distinctions in the text. “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” That is relationship. “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God.” That is the inheritance flowing from sonship. Then comes the additional statement: “and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” There is the condition connected with suffering and shared glory. The believer becomes God’s child by faith in Jesus Christ, not by suffering. Galatians 3:26 says, “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” Yet Scripture connects certain aspects of reigning, joint-heirship, glory, crown, and reward with faithful suffering. Every child belongs to the family, but not every child has followed the Firstborn through reproach.

Every believer has Christ as his life, but not every believer will hear the same commendation for how that life was lived.

The blood determines whether a sinner belongs to Christ; faithful suffering affects what the believer receives from Christ. Salvation is free because Jesus Christ paid for it. Reigning is rewarded because the believer stood with Christ when standing carried a cost. The Christian does not endure hardship to keep the Holy Spirit from unsealing him. He endures because the Captain of his salvation walked through suffering before entering glory, and fellowship with that rejected Christ cannot be maintained from a permanently reserved seat in the world's grandstand. The crown follows the cross, and the throne follows faithful service, but neither crown nor throne replaces Calvary. The believer may be eternally secure in the family while forfeiting honors that belong to faithful sons who refused to be ashamed of their Father's name.

1. Sonship Is Received by Faith and Not Purchased Through Suffering

The believer becomes a child of God by faith in Jesus Christ. John 1:12 states, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." Galatians 3:26 repeats the truth: "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." Neither passage requires a season of persecution, a prison record, a martyr's wound, or a certificate of endurance before sonship begins. The sinner receives Christ, believes the gospel, and is born of God. Sonship rests upon the new birth, and the new birth is God's operation through His word and Spirit. A man no more suffers himself into God's family than a baby earns natural birth by enduring the discomfort of the delivery room.

The believer's relationship is secured by the work of the entire Godhead. He is accepted in the beloved, placed into Christ's body, sealed by the Holy Spirit "unto the day of redemption," and kept by the power of God. Romans 8:15 says, "ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." That cry arises from relationship already established. The Christian may behave like a rebellious son, a frightened son, a lazy son, or a faithful son, but his conduct does not create or destroy the Father who begat him. A disobedient child may face correction, forfeiture, shame, and loss of privilege, but he does not crawl back into nonexistence because he disappointed his father. Religion invented spiritual unbirth because biblical chastening did not provide enough leverage for the church office.

Suffering therefore cannot be inserted into the terms of salvation. Eternal life is "the gift of God" (Romans 6:23), while faithful suffering belongs to discipleship and reward. Christ alone suffered as the sin-bearing substitute. First Peter 3:18 says, "Christ also hath once

suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.” No Christian suffering can add to that atonement. Paul’s stripes could not wash away sin, Peter’s crucifixion could not justify the ungodly, and a martyr’s blood cannot improve the blood of the Lamb. Suffering with Christ may lead to honor beside Christ, but only Christ’s suffering for sin can bring a sinner to God.

2. Heirs of God and Joint-Heirs With Christ Must Be Read as Written

Romans 8:17 begins, “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God.” The first inheritance flows directly from the relationship. The child belongs to God, possesses eternal life, and has a place in the family because he is in Christ. Galatians 4:7 says, “Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.” The believer does not become an heir of God by outperforming other Christians. He is an heir “through Christ.” Everything necessary for his acceptance, standing, and eternal life resides in the Son of God. The poorest and weakest believer who has trusted Christ possesses more lasting wealth than every unsaved king who ever counted his gold beneath a guarded roof.

Romans 8:17 then adds, “and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” The verse connects joint participation in Christ’s glory with suffering beside Him. The little word “if” did not crawl into the text through a printer’s error. It marks a condition. Being an heir of God rests upon being a child; the shared inheritance and glory in view are connected with suffering with Christ. Scripture does not say that the believer must suffer to remain alive in Christ. It says that suffering with Christ bears upon being glorified together with Christ. The distinction is not complicated unless a theological system has already hired a man to remove it.

A joint-heir shares in the reign and honor of the principal heir. Christ is the appointed “heir of all things” (Hebrews 1:2), and His kingdom will fill the earth. Believers are in Christ and will be with Him, but Scripture repeatedly connects degrees of reigning responsibility and royal honor with faithfulness. The issue is not whether the believer enters eternity but what place he occupies in the administration of Christ’s kingdom. A family name may be inherited at birth, while responsibility in the family estate is entrusted according to character and faithfulness. Heaven is not a socialist retirement home where the faithful martyr and the lifelong spiritual loafer receive identical assignments because both filled out the same membership card.

3. The Faithful Saying Connects Suffering With Reigning

Second Timothy 2:11–13 says, “It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.” Paul is writing to Timothy, a saved minister whom he has already called “my dearly beloved son.” The passage does not

teach Timothy how to obtain eternal life. It encourages him to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. The immediate context speaks of soldiers, athletes, husbandmen, bonds, endurance, and the elect. Paul is preparing a servant for hardship, not presenting an altar call to an unsaved congregation. A passage about a soldier earning approval in battle should not be converted into a pamphlet explaining how a civilian is born into the nation.

The promise is direct: "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him." Suffering does not merely lead to vague spiritual improvement or a larger emotional vocabulary. It bears upon reigning. Christ's coming kingdom involves actual authority, responsibility, judgment, administration, and honor. First Corinthians 6:2–3 says, "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?" and even adds, "Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" The Church is not destined to spend eternity floating on clouds while plucking harps and wondering whether anything will ever happen. The saints are connected with Christ's government. But Scripture does not treat every believer's preparedness for that government as identical. A man who would not govern his own appetite faithfully on earth has little claim to complain if he is not handed cities in the kingdom.

Second Timothy continues, "if we deny him, he also will deny us." Religion stops there, sounds an alarm, and declares that Paul has revoked eternal security. But the next verse says, "If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself." The believer is a member of Christ's body; Christ cannot deny Himself. In context, the denial corresponds to the preceding promise of reigning. If the believer refuses Christ's reproach, Christ can deny him the honor associated with faithful identification. The Christian may avoid suffering now and forfeit reigning privilege later. He remains secure in Christ because Christ remains faithful, but security does not force the King to hand a throne to a servant who deserted every difficult post.

4. The Fellowship of Christ's Sufferings Is Not Found in a Comfortable Pew

Paul declared his desire in Philippians 3:10: "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." Paul already knew Christ savingly. He was not seeking a second justification or attempting to earn eternal life through deeper suffering. He desired the experiential knowledge that comes from walking the same rejected road as his Lord. There is a knowledge of Christ received through the word, a knowledge developed through prayer and obedience, and a fellowship discovered when loyalty to Christ becomes expensive. Some things about the Saviour are learned at the table; others are learned in the furnace.

The world did not crown Christ during His first advent. It mocked Him, contradicted Him, accused Him, struck Him, spat upon Him, stripped Him, and nailed Him outside the gate.

Jesus said, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18). A disciple who follows Him faithfully should not be astonished when the same world expresses the same disposition. The forms of hostility may change—ridicule instead of nails, exclusion instead of scourging, professional loss instead of confiscation—but the principle remains. The world welcomes a Christ reduced to sentiment and ceremony. It objects when the living Lord begins contradicting its sins.

Philippians 1:29 says, “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.” Believing and suffering appear in the same verse, but they are distinguished. Believing receives salvation; suffering accompanies faithful identification. The first brings the sinner into Christ, while the second may carry the believer into deeper fellowship with Christ. Modern Christianity treats suffering as though it were a shipping error that faith should immediately return to sender. Paul calls it something “given.” The pew promises relief from every discomfort; Christ promises His presence in the fire. The pew has cushions, but the throne has fellowship.

5. Not All Suffering Qualifies as Suffering With Christ

Suffering by itself does not earn reward. Men suffer because of sin, foolishness, pride, negligence, criminal conduct, unnecessary quarrels, and poor judgment. First Peter 2:20 asks, “For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently?” A Christian who suffers because he lied, cheated, neglected responsibility, mistreated people, or behaved like a sanctified porcupine is not sharing Christ’s reproach. He is reaping what he sowed. Adding a Bible verse to the complaint does not transform consequences into persecution. Some believers think everybody dislikes them because they are taking a stand, when the truth is that everybody dislikes them because they are obnoxious.

First Peter 4:15–16 draws the distinction: “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed.” The suffering that receives divine approval arises from faithful Christian identity and conduct. It comes because the believer obeyed truth, refused compromise, maintained holiness, preached the gospel, defended the Scriptures, or stood with Christ against the current of the age. Peter even includes the busybody beside the murderer, thief, and evildoer because religious interference in other men’s business can manufacture a remarkable amount of unnecessary suffering. Not every slammed door is persecution; sometimes it is a neighbor protecting his evening.

True suffering with Christ must also be borne in Christ’s spirit. First Peter 2:21 says, “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.” When reviled,

He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; He committed Himself to the righteous Judge. A believer may hold the right position with the wrong spirit and damage the testimony he claims to defend. Courage is not carnality with a Bible under its arm. Faithfulness can be sharp without becoming fleshly, bold without becoming vain, and uncompromising without becoming dishonest. The reward belongs not merely to the man who encountered opposition but to the man who remained faithful to Christ while passing through it.

6. Crowns and Thrones Belong to Faithful Service

The New Testament promises specific crowns for specific faithfulness. First Corinthians 9:25 presents an incorruptible crown in connection with disciplined striving. First Thessalonians 2:19 speaks of a crown of rejoicing connected with souls. Second Timothy 4:8 promises a crown of righteousness to those who love Christ's appearing. James 1:12 names a crown of life for the man who endures temptation, while First Peter 5:4 promises a crown of glory to faithful shepherds. These crowns are not alternate names for eternal life. Eternal life is the gift of God received by faith; crowns are rewards associated with service, endurance, ministry, and devotion. A gift is received, while a crown is won.

Reigning authority is likewise connected with overcoming and faithfulness. Revelation 2:26 says, "And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations." Revelation 3:21 adds, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne." These promises concern real participation in Christ's royal authority. They are not sentimental language for merely being present in heaven. The Lord will return as King of kings, rule the nations with a rod of iron, and assign responsibility according to His righteous judgment. The servant who was faithful over a few things will be made ruler over many things. Christ does not distribute thrones like promotional keychains at the church entrance.

Paul understood this relationship between suffering, service, and reward. Near death he could say, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith," and then look forward to "a crown of righteousness" (2 Timothy 4:7–8). His crown did not secure his salvation; Christ had secured that decades earlier. The crown recognized the course completed. Paul had carried the gospel through beatings, prisons, shipwrecks, hunger, betrayal, weariness, and continual danger. He did not endure those things to persuade God to keep him saved. He endured because he had been saved, called, and entrusted with a ministry. The scars were not payment for heaven; they were evidence that Paul had not abandoned his post when hell opened fire.

7. A Secure Son Can Forfeit Honor Without Leaving the Family

First Corinthians 3:15 presents a man whose works burn while he himself remains saved: “he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” The passage separates the believer’s standing from his reward. The foundation is Jesus Christ, so the man is secure; the superstructure consists of his works, so it can be tested and lost. If every believer necessarily received the same honor, there could be no meaningful loss. If loss meant hell, the statement “he himself shall be saved” would be nonsense. Paul gives us a saved man with a secure foundation and an empty account. That is not loss of sonship; it is loss suffered by a son.

Colossians 3:23–25 commands believers to serve heartily “as to the Lord,” adding, “Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.” The passage then warns, “But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.” Inheritance has an aspect connected with reward, and wrongdoing carries consequence even for the believer. God does not overlook carnal service because the offender belongs to the family. Neither does He cast the believer into hell because he served poorly. The righteous Judge can preserve relationship while judging conduct. Earthly fathers understand that distinction every day, but theology occasionally misplaces the family dictionary.

Second John 8 warns, “Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.” A full reward implies the possibility of a diminished reward. Revelation 3:11 says, “hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” The believer may surrender what faithful labor could have gained. He may be in the kingdom without holding the position he might have held, present before Christ without receiving the commendation he might have heard, and eternally saved without possessing the crown he might have cast before the throne. Security guarantees that Christ will not lose His child; it does not guarantee that the child cannot lose his crown.

Conclusion

Salvation, suffering, and reigning must remain in their biblical order. The sinner is saved by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. He becomes God’s child, receives eternal life, is accepted in the beloved, placed into Christ’s body, and sealed with the Holy Spirit. None of that is earned by hardship. After salvation, however, the believer is called to suffer with Christ, endure hardness, keep the faith, overcome temptation, finish his course, and remain loyal beneath reproach. Those things concern discipleship, fellowship, inheritance, crown, and reigning authority. The blood opens the family door; faithfulness affects the royal assignment.

The throne possesses a fellowship the pew never promised because the throne stands on the far side of rejection. Christ suffered before He entered His glory, and those who would share conspicuously in His reign should not be ashamed to share in His reproach. The believer may avoid every costly stand, remain silent when truth demands speech, compromise when holiness demands separation, and retreat whenever obedience becomes dangerous. Christ will remain faithful to His body, but the King does not owe a crown to a deserter. A secure salvation may carry an unrewarded life all the way to heaven, but security cannot make cowardice look like faithfulness beneath the fire.

The Christian should therefore stop asking whether suffering proves God has forgotten him and begin asking whether suffering has brought him into fellowship with the rejected Christ. The present affliction is temporary, but the glory is eternal. Paul said, “our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17). The world may remove a seat, a salary, a reputation, a friendship, a freedom, or even a physical life, but it cannot touch the reward held by Christ. The pew is comfortable, the cross is costly, and the throne is coming. The blood makes a believer a son; faithful suffering prepares that son to reign.

7 of 10: Salvation Discipleship and Reward — When the Christian’s Work Meets the Christian’s Fire

Key Passage: 1 Corinthians 3:11–15

“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.”

Introduction

Every Christian is building something that will eventually meet a fire he cannot avoid, influence, bribe, flatter, confuse, or outvote. That fire will not care how famous the builder became, how large his ministry appeared, how many titles followed his name, how often people applauded his sermons, or how impressive his religious machinery looked from the road. It will not be persuaded by photographs, statistics, testimonials, denominational endorsements, bestselling books, attendance records, polished broadcasts, or memorial

plaques. The Judgment Seat of Christ is not a religious awards banquet arranged by men who agreed beforehand to compliment one another. It is the searching examination of the saved man's work by the Lord whose "eyes were as a flame of fire" (Revelation 1:14). The Christian may spend his life impressing men who can see only the paint, but Christ will test the lumber underneath.

First Corinthians 3:11–15 does not describe a trial to determine whether the believer is allowed into heaven. The foundation has already been laid, and "other foundation can no man lay." That foundation is Jesus Christ. The man standing in the passage is already building upon Christ, and even when his work burns, "he himself shall be saved." The fire therefore tests the believer's work, not Christ's blood; his service, not his sonship; the building materials, not the foundation. Salvation was settled by the cross, received by faith, and secured in Christ. The Judgment Seat concerns what the saved man did after God placed him upon that unmovable foundation. Religion reads "he himself shall be saved" and still manages to find hell in the verse, proving that a man can stare straight at daylight and remain loyal to his flashlight.

The passage also destroys the opposite error—that eternal security makes Christian conduct eternally inconsequential. The believer whose works burn remains saved, but he "shall suffer loss." Those are not decorative words. A saved man can reach the Judgment Seat with a secure foundation beneath him and a smoking ruin around him. He can possess eternal life while losing the reward that faithful labor might have gained. The blood keeps him from condemnation, but it does not turn stubble into gold. Grace guarantees his relationship, but it does not guarantee Christ's commendation upon wasted years. The Judgment Seat stands between two religious ditches: the legalist's false terror that every failed work cancels salvation, and the careless Christian's false comfort that no failed work matters. The Bible leaves the believer eternally secure and eternally accountable at the same time.

1. The Foundation Is Jesus Christ and Cannot Be Tried Again

Paul begins with the foundation because every proper understanding of the Judgment Seat must begin with the believer's settled position in Christ. "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." The foundation is not church membership, water baptism, moral reform, law keeping, religious experience, emotional sincerity, faithful service, or personal endurance. It is a Person. Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again according to the Scriptures. The believing sinner is justified freely by God's grace, made accepted in the beloved, sealed with the Holy Spirit, and placed into Christ's body. His standing rests upon Christ's righteousness rather than his own

performance. If the foundation depended upon the builder's skill, it would crack before the first wall was raised.

The fire at the Judgment Seat does not examine whether Christ's foundation remains sufficient. Calvary already answered that question forever. When Jesus cried, "It is finished" (John 19:30), the saving work was complete. Hebrews 10:12 says, "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God." Christ will not stand at the Judgment Seat and reconsider whether His sacrifice covered the believer's sins. He will not compare His blood with the Christian's service record and decide that the blood needs help. The believer's eternal condemnation was borne by his Substitute, and Romans 8:1 declares, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." The Judgment Seat is not Calvary reopened for additional business.

This distinction exposes the false doctrine of purgatory as well as every Protestant version of temporary salvation. First Corinthians 3 does not place the believer in a furnace to burn sin out of his soul. The fire tries "every man's work." The wood, hay, and stubble burn; the man remains saved. There is no priest collecting money on earth, no sacrament shortening the heat, no relative purchasing an early release, and no religious corporation operating a tollbooth between death and glory. The passage concerns an examination of service for reward. Rome saw a Christian's works burning, ignored the words "he himself shall be saved," invented a place where the Christian burns instead, and then started selling relief. Religion rarely wastes a misread verse when there is property to buy.

2. Every Believer Is Building Upon the Foundation

Paul says, "Now if any man build upon this foundation." Salvation places the believer upon Christ, but the Christian life involves building. Every day contributes material to the structure. Every act of obedience or disobedience, every use of time, every ministry decision, every motive, every sacrifice, every neglected opportunity, and every response to truth becomes part of the record. The Christian cannot choose whether he will build; he can only choose what kind of material he adds. Even idleness is construction material. A buried talent, an unanswered calling, and an opportunity deliberately ignored do not disappear from the accounting merely because nothing visible was done.

The responsibility is individual. First Corinthians 3 repeatedly says "any man," "every man's work," "if any man's work abide," and "if any man's work shall be burned." A believer cannot hide behind his denomination, pastor, congregation, family, culture, or generation. Romans 14:12 says, "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." The pastor will not answer for the church member's private choices, and the church member cannot

transfer his stewardship to the pastor. A man may follow a crowd into compromise, but he will not face Christ as a crowd. The Judgment Seat has individual appointments.

This personal responsibility makes comparison with other Christians both foolish and dangerous. Peter once asked the Lord about John, “and what shall this man do?” Jesus answered, “If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me” (John 21:21–22). The believer’s assignment comes from Christ, and faithfulness must be measured against that assignment. One servant may preach to thousands, another may care faithfully for an invalid, another may raise children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and another may labor unseen in prayer. Men cannot accurately rank those lives because they do not know the instructions each servant received. Christ knows the assignment, the opportunity, the ability, the opposition, and the motive. Heaven does not grade by publicity.

3. The Six Materials Reveal Two Kinds of Work

Paul names six materials: “gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble.” The first three endure fire; the last three feed it. Gold in Scripture is associated with deity and divine value, silver with redemption, and precious stones with enduring beauty and costly formation. These materials suggest work rooted in God’s truth, performed through His power, connected with Christ’s redemptive purpose, and shaped through faithful obedience. Wood, hay, and stubble may occupy more space and create a larger visible pile, but size becomes a disadvantage when the match is struck. The largest haystack in the county is still less valuable than a small chest of gold.

Wood, hay, and stubble represent the kind of Christian activity that lacks eternal substance. Some works are unscriptural, some selfishly motivated, some performed to please men, some produced through envy and strife, and some are religious distractions from the work God actually assigned. A man can build an enormous ministry while neglecting his family, preach truth to impress hearers rather than help them, give money to purchase influence, or perform service because he cannot bear to be unnoticed. The activity may be real, exhausting, and publicly praised, yet still be constructed from material that cannot survive Christ’s scrutiny. Religious busyness is not the same thing as spiritual fruitfulness. A squirrel can spend the entire day running inside a wheel without arriving anywhere.

The materials also reveal that outward appearances cannot settle eternal value. Gold, silver, and precious stones are compact and often hidden, while wood, hay, and stubble are bulky and visible. A quiet act of obedience may possess greater eternal weight than an impressive public campaign. A forgotten missionary, an unknown prayer warrior, a faithful

mother, a truthful preacher in a small congregation, or a believer who stood alone rather than compromise may be building with material heaven values. The world erects monuments to men whose work will become smoke, while Christ records cups of cold water given in His name. Earth measures the scaffolding; heaven inspects the structure.

4. The Fire Tests the Sort and Not the Size

First Corinthians 3:13 says, “the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.” The verse does not say “how much it is.” Quantity has a place in stewardship, but quantity does not determine quality. Men naturally admire whatever can be counted, photographed, displayed, or entered into an annual report. They measure attendance, income, buildings, decisions, publications, followers, and applause because human beings can count without possessing spiritual discernment. Christ will examine the sort. One ounce of gold will survive what ten wagonloads of hay cannot endure. The fire has no sentimental attachment to large piles.

The fire represents Christ’s infallible examination. Revelation 2:18 identifies the Son of God as the One “who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire.” Nothing escapes those eyes. Christ sees the compromise hidden beneath impressive results, the ambition concealed beneath apparent zeal, and the private disobedience living behind public ministry. He also sees every faithful act that men overlooked, every quiet sacrifice no one thanked, and every stand for truth that cost more than observers knew. Human judgment is often blinded by polish and publicity. Christ sees through paint, plaster, advertising, and ministerial stage lighting.

The day “shall declare it.” Present appearances do not provide the final verdict. Some works now condemned by men will receive Christ’s approval, while some works now celebrated will vanish in smoke. Paul said, “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come” (1 Corinthians 4:5). That command does not forbid all discernment or church discipline; the same apostle repeatedly required both. It forbids premature final evaluation of hidden motives and ultimate reward. The full record waits for the Lord. Until then, Christianity conducts many award ceremonies without access to the Judge’s scorecard.

5. The Counsels of the Heart Will Be Made Manifest

First Corinthians 4:5 says Christ “will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts.” The Judgment Seat examines motives as well as actions. The counsel of the heart is the inner purpose, calculation, desire, and design that moved the hands. A man may preach Christ from envy and strife, as Paul observed in Philippians 1, or preach from goodwill. Both mouths pronounce gospel facts, but the hearts

are building with different materials. A gift may arise from charity or from the desire to control its recipient. A public stand may arise from conviction or from a hunger for attention. Men see the deed; Christ sees the engine.

This examination should sober every Christian worker. The flesh can perform religious service and become proud of its humility before the day is over. It can pray publicly to be admired, give to be remembered, preach to be praised, suffer to be pitied, and defend truth to advertise its own courage. Jesus warned about men who performed righteous acts “to be seen of men” and said, “They have their reward” (Matthew 6:2). Human applause may constitute the entire payment. When a man performs for the gallery, he should not be surprised if the gallery’s applause is all he receives. Heaven does not pay twice for work already cashed out in earthly admiration.

Yet the exposure of motives also brings comfort to the faithful servant whose labor was misunderstood. Christ knows when a preacher spoke hard truth out of love rather than arrogance, when a believer refused compromise out of loyalty rather than stubbornness, and when hidden service was performed solely for the Lord. Hebrews 6:10 says, “For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love.” Men forget, misrepresent, overlook, and occasionally take credit for another person’s labor. God forgets nothing worthy of remembrance. The Judgment Seat will correct earth’s false records without requiring testimony from the guilty clerks.

6. A Saved Man Can Suffer Devastating Loss

First Corinthians 3:15 presents the solemn result: “If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss.” The loss is personal, real, and eternal in consequence. The verse does not say that the man merely feels momentary embarrassment before receiving exactly what every faithful servant receives. Something that might have endured is gone.

Opportunities cannot be relived, wasted years cannot be returned to stewardship, and crowns forfeited through unfaithfulness cannot be manufactured after the race is over. The Christian may enter eternity knowing that his life could have produced something different before Christ.

The verse immediately protects eternal security: “but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” The man is saved because his foundation is Christ. The works burn because their quality failed. This is not a lost sinner escaping hell at the last second, nor a believer being cleansed in purgatory. It is a Christian whose service does not survive examination. The legalist hates the phrase “he himself shall be saved” because it secures the failing believer. The careless Christian hates “he shall suffer loss” because it gives failure an eternal

consequence. God wrote both statements in the same verse and left each ditch without an inspired bridge.

The possibility of loss explains the warnings about reward. Second John 8 says, “Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.” Revelation 3:11 says, “hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” First Corinthians 9:27 records Paul’s concern that after preaching to others he might become “a castaway”—disapproved for the prize, not cast into hell. The apostle who taught eternal security also disciplined his body because he understood accountability. He did not fear that Christ would lose him; he feared becoming an unapproved workman.

7. The Judgment Seat Should Govern the Christian’s Present Walk

Second Corinthians 5:9–10 joins present ambition with future examination: “Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” Paul does not mean accepted into God’s family, for he has already said believers are accepted in the beloved. The word concerns being well-pleasing to the Lord. Paul labored with Christ’s verdict in view. He did not ask merely whether an action was popular, profitable, safe, or religiously respectable. He asked whether it would please the One before whom he must stand.

The believer should judge himself now beneath the word of God. First Corinthians 11:31 says, “For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.” Self-judgment is not morbid introspection or religious despair. It is honest agreement with Scripture about sin, motive, stewardship, doctrine, and conduct. The Christian confesses known sin, corrects wrong priorities, restores injured relationships where possible, abandons false works, and returns to his appointed course. The fire is coming, but the building site remains open today. Repentance cannot recover every lost opportunity, yet it can prevent tomorrow from becoming another piece of yesterday’s stubble.

The believer must also abide in Christ. Jesus said, “He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5). Christian work performed through fleshly power may impress fleshly observers, but it cannot produce the fruit of the Spirit. The believer’s labor must arise from fellowship with Christ, obedience to His word, dependence upon His Spirit, and love that seeks His glory. The safest preparation for the fire is not building less; it is building with the right material under the direction of the Master Builder.

Conclusion

The Judgment Seat of Christ is real, searching, personal, and unavoidable. Every believer will stand before the Lord and give account of his own stewardship. Christ will examine not

merely the quantity of Christian activity but its quality, motive, truth, and faithfulness. The day will declare what human publicity concealed. Gold, silver, and precious stones will endure; wood, hay, and stubble will disappear. The same fire that exposes empty religious performance will reveal the eternal value of humble service men never noticed.

The believer's salvation is not on trial because his foundation is Jesus Christ. The fire does not test whether the blood remains sufficient, whether the Spirit's seal held, or whether eternal life was truly everlasting. The man whose works burn "shall be saved," but he "shall suffer loss." Those two truths must remain together. Eternal security does not remove accountability, and accountability does not cancel eternal security. Christ keeps the believer, but the believer remains responsible for what he builds upon Christ.

Every Christian is carrying material to the construction site today. Every choice adds something to the building, every motive shapes its quality, and every opportunity moves toward the coming fire. The question is not whether the foundation will stand; Jesus Christ cannot fail. The question is what will remain above that foundation when the smoke clears. A lifetime of religious motion may become one brief flame, while one costly act of obedience may shine like a precious stone. The fire is coming, the Judge is righteous, and the building site closes at death or the Rapture. Only a fool would spend the rest of his Christian life collecting kindling.

8 of 10: Salvation Discipleship and Reward — Heaven Is Free but Crowns Are Not Handed Out at the Door

Key Passage: 1 Corinthians 9:24–27

"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

Introduction

Heaven is free, but crowns are not handed out at the door like souvenir hats at a religious convention. Eternal life is "the gift of God" through Jesus Christ our Lord, received by faith without works, human merit, religious endurance, ceremonial assistance, or denominational approval. Crowns, however, are connected with running, striving, laboring,

enduring, watching, shepherding, fighting, finishing, and remaining faithful when the flesh demands ease and the world offers compromise. Salvation answers the question of where the believer will spend eternity; crowns concern what Christ will recognize when the believer's earthly course is examined. One rests entirely upon the Saviour's finished work; the other reflects what the saved sinner permitted that Saviour to accomplish through a yielded life. A man receives eternal life because Christ died for him, but he receives a crown because, after being saved, he did not spend the rest of his days using grace as a hammock.

Paul did not speak of crowns as decorative upgrades to salvation or religious ornaments granted for occupying a pew until the Rapture. He compared the Christian life to an athletic contest in which men run to obtain a prize. He spoke of temperance, discipline, purpose, fighting, and bringing the body into subjection. The runners in the ancient games did not receive the crown because they lived within walking distance of the stadium, owned athletic clothing, or could explain the history of the race. They trained, entered, strove, and finished according to the rules. Likewise, the Christian is not crowned merely because he attended church, learned prophetic terminology, accumulated sermon notes, or survived long enough to hear a trumpet. Salvation places the believer in the race; faithfulness governs the running; Christ determines the prize.

The New Testament names crowns associated with particular forms of fidelity: an incorruptible crown for disciplined Christian striving, a crown of rejoicing connected with souls, a crown of life for enduring temptation and remaining faithful beneath trial, a crown of glory for faithful shepherding, and a crown of righteousness for loving the appearing of Jesus Christ. None of these crowns replaces the blood, improves Christ's righteousness, or purchases entrance into heaven. They are the righteous Judge's recognition of work performed through His grace and for His glory. They may be gained, guarded, diminished, or forfeited, for Christ warns, "hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Revelation 3:11). A crown that cannot be lost requires no warning to hold it fast, and a gift that can be earned was never a gift to begin with.

1. Salvation Is the Gift While the Crown Is the Prize

Romans 6:23 establishes salvation's nature: "the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." A gift proceeds from the giver's generosity rather than the recipient's achievement. Ephesians 2:8-9 says salvation is "the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." The sinner does not run, strive, labor, endure, or discipline himself into eternal life. He believes on the Lord Jesus Christ and is saved. Christ ran the saving course, endured the cross, bore the judgment, shed the blood, defeated death, and finished the work. The sinner receives the benefit by faith. Calvary is not a qualifying race in which

Christ carries the sinner most of the distance and then drops him at the final turn to see whether he can finish.

The crown belongs to a different doctrinal category. First Corinthians 9:24 says, “So run, that ye may obtain.” Paul does not say, “So run, that ye may become a child of God.” Sonship comes by faith in Christ Jesus. He says run to obtain the prize. The prize concerns performance within the race after the runner has entered it. A man must possess life before he can run, and the Christian must be saved before Christian service has any spiritual value. Good works cannot produce the new birth, but the new birth should produce good works. The delivery room establishes life; the racetrack reveals what the living man does with it.

Confusing gift and prize either corrupts salvation or empties reward. If eternal life is the prize, then salvation depends upon Christian performance and grace ceases to be grace. If crowns are merely another name for salvation, then Paul’s commands to strive, run, discipline the body, and obtain become empty theatrical language. The legalist turns the gift into a paycheck, while the careless Christian turns the prize into a participation ribbon. Scripture permits neither arrangement. Salvation is free because Christ paid for it; the crown is rewarded because the believer faithfully ran the course Christ assigned.

2. The Incorruptible Crown Requires Disciplined Striving

First Corinthians 9:25 says, “And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things.” Temperance is Spirit-governed self-control. The runner refuses to let appetite dictate the training schedule, comfort cancel the discipline, or temporary pleasure steal the prize. Paul says earthly athletes submit to discipline “to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.” Their wreath eventually withered, their records were surpassed, and the cheers died with the crowd. The Christian strives for a crown that cannot decay. It is remarkable how much discipline men will endure for a medal that gathers dust while Christians complain that prayer, Bible study, separation, and faithful service are unreasonable burdens.

Paul’s language is severe because the flesh does not surrender control through polite negotiation. “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection.” The body is a useful servant and a disastrous master. It demands sleep when duty calls, food when fasting would sharpen prayer, entertainment when Scripture requires attention, silence when truth must be spoken, and immediate satisfaction whenever holiness says no. Paul did not trust apostolic office, theological knowledge, previous sacrifice, or public success to exempt him from discipline. He treated his body as something to be governed lest appetite disqualify his service.

The word “castaway” in verse 27 does not mean Paul feared losing eternal life. It concerns becoming disapproved after preaching to others, like an athlete rejected from the prize. Paul knew that nothing could separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus, yet he also knew that an undisciplined servant could forfeit reward. The same apostle who taught eternal security kept his body under because security is not immunity from disqualification. Christ will keep the believer’s soul, but He is not obligated to crown the believer’s undisciplined flesh.

3. The Crown of Rejoicing Is Connected With Souls

Paul asked the Thessalonians, “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing?” He then answered, “Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy” (1 Thessalonians 2:19–20). The crown of rejoicing is connected with people reached, taught, strengthened, and established through faithful gospel ministry. Paul’s treasure was not a building bearing his name, a denominational office, or a religious empire extending across Asia. It was redeemed people standing in Christ’s presence. Souls outlive organizations, property, statistics, and ministerial reputations.

This crown does not belong only to famous evangelists. Gospel fruit ordinarily involves many laborers whom the world never sees. One believer prays, another gives, another distributes Scripture, another speaks personally, another preaches publicly, and another patiently teaches the convert. Paul said, “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase” (1 Corinthians 3:6). Neither planter nor waterer can regenerate a soul; God gives life. Yet He rewards faithful participation in the work. Heaven keeps a more accurate missionary report than any office on earth.

The Christian must guard against turning soul-winning into a numbers contest. Men can manipulate professions, count raised hands, pressure children, manufacture emotional responses, and print glowing reports before any fruit appears. Christ sees whether the gospel was preached clearly, whether the motive was charity, and whether the laborer cared for people or merely counted them. A soul is not a statistic nailed to a preacher’s trophy wall. The crown of rejoicing belongs to faithful gospel labor whose joy is found in people standing before Christ, not in a worker standing before people.

4. The Crown of Life Belongs to Faithful Endurance

James 1:12 says, “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life.” The crown is connected with endurance under testing. Temptation may include the pressure to sin, abandon truth, escape suffering through compromise, or choose immediate relief over faithful obedience. God does not tempt men with evil, as James immediately explains, but He allows faith to be tried. The trial exposes

what comfort conceals. Anybody can boast about loyalty while the sun shines and the pantry is full; the furnace discovers whether the profession contains metal or paint.

Revelation 2:10 adds, “be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” The believers at Smyrna faced tribulation, poverty, imprisonment, and possible execution. Christ did not promise to remove every trial before it arrived. He promised a crown beyond the trial. The world could lock their bodies in prison and remove physical life, but it could not reach the reward in Christ’s hand. Rome possessed swords; Christ possessed the crown. Caesar could announce a sentence; the Lord Jesus Christ retained the final verdict.

The crown of life is not eternal life earned by surviving persecution. Eternal life is already possessed by faith. The crown recognizes fidelity when temptation and suffering made compromise attractive. A believer may save his comfort and lose the crown, or surrender his comfort and gain what cannot be taken by death. Hell offers temporary relief in exchange for eternal reward, and the flesh is always willing to examine the contract. Faith tears up the contract and looks toward Christ.

5. The Crown of Glory Belongs to Faithful Shepherds

First Peter 5:2 commands elders, “Feed the flock of God which is among you.” The shepherd’s first duty is feeding, not entertaining, flattering, manipulating, or building a personal following. God’s sheep require Scripture. They need doctrine, correction, warning, comfort, reproof, exhortation, and rightly divided truth. A pastor who replaces the Bible with motivational talk has not fed the flock; he has handed starving sheep a menu and congratulated himself on the typography. The pulpit is a feeding place, not a religious talent show.

Peter warns shepherds against serving “for filthy lucre” or acting “as being lords over God’s heritage.” The flock belongs to God, not the pastor. Ministry is neither a private kingdom nor a family corporation. The shepherd must be “an ensample to the flock,” leading through sound doctrine, godly conduct, sacrificial care, and faithful courage. Christ will judge not only what the shepherd preached but why he preached, how he treated the sheep, whether he protected them from wolves, and whether he fed the weak rather than merely photographing the crowd.

First Peter 5:4 promises, “And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.” Earthly recognition fades. Congregations forget, reputations change, buildings are sold, and denominational plaques wind up in storage boxes. The crown of glory comes from the Chief Shepherd, whose judgment cannot be influenced by church politics, financial pressure, or public fashion. The faithful under-

shepherd may be overlooked on earth and crowned in heaven; the celebrity hireling may reverse that order.

6. The Crown of Righteousness Belongs to Those Who Love His Appearing

Near the end of his life Paul wrote, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7). He had not merely begun well or enjoyed a season of usefulness. He finished. He had endured prisons, beatings, shipwrecks, betrayal, weariness, hunger, opposition, and abandonment without surrendering the message entrusted to him. The course was costly, but Paul reached the end still holding the faith. A good beginning is a blessing; a faithful finish is a testimony.

Paul continued, “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day” (2 Timothy 4:8). The crown did not come from an earthly committee but from “the righteous judge.” Men had treated Paul as a criminal, but Christ would judge him accurately. Rome could place a sword above his neck; Christ had already laid up a crown beyond the blade. The world’s verdict expired at death, while Christ’s verdict waited on the other side.

The promise extends “unto all them also that love his appearing.” Loving Christ’s appearing is more than enjoying prophecy diagrams or arguing about dates. The believer who loves His appearing orders life in anticipation of seeing Him. First John 3:3 says, “every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” A man sincerely expecting the Owner to return does not treat the house as abandoned property. The hope of Christ’s appearing cleans the hands, steadies the heart, sharpens the ministry, and makes the world’s temporary decorations look like stage scenery awaiting removal.

7. Crowns Can Be Gained Guarded and Forfeited

Revelation 3:11 records Christ’s warning: “Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” The believer must hold what has been entrusted to him. Truth can be compromised, testimony ruined, opportunities wasted, ministries abandoned, and rewards forfeited. A crown may be connected with labor already begun, yet later carelessness can destroy what faithful perseverance would have completed. Second John 8 says, “Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.” A full reward implies that less than a full reward is possible.

No man can steal eternal life from the believer, because eternal life is hidden with Christ in God. But another person may influence a Christian toward the compromise through which he forfeits a crown. False teachers can corrupt doctrine, worldly companions can weaken separation, flattering congregations can soften a preacher, and religious ambition can

redirect service from Christ's glory to personal advancement. The devil cannot remove the believer from Christ's hand, so he works to remove the crown from the believer's future. If he cannot keep the Christian out of heaven, he will attempt to send him there empty-handed.

Crowns ultimately magnify Jesus Christ rather than human flesh. Revelation 4:10–11 shows the twenty-four elders falling before the throne and casting their crowns before Him, saying, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power." The crown received from Christ becomes an instrument for honoring Christ. No faithful believer will stand in glory admiring his own discipline, courage, evangelism, shepherding, or endurance as though grace played no part. Paul said, "by the grace of God I am what I am," and even his abundant labor was grace working with him. Christ supplies the life, power, calling, opportunity, word, and final victory. The believer brings the yielded will; Christ produces what deserves the crown.

Conclusion

Heaven is free because Jesus Christ paid the complete price. The sinner receives eternal life by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, not by running a Christian race, enduring temptation, winning souls, shepherding a flock, or loving the Second Coming with sufficient intensity. Christ's blood opens heaven, His righteousness justifies the believer, and His Spirit seals him unto the day of redemption. No crown can improve that salvation, and no missing crown can cancel it. The poorest rewarded believer in glory will still possess eternal life because eternal life is found in the Son of God.

Crowns, however, are not handed out merely because the believer arrived. They recognize particular faithfulness: a body disciplined for Christian service, souls reached through gospel labor, temptation endured without surrender, a flock faithfully fed, and a life ordered in expectation of Christ's appearing. The Christian does not compete against other believers for a limited supply of heavenly metal. He runs against his own flesh, the pressure of the world, the devices of the devil, and the wasting passage of time. His race is the course Christ assigned, and his duty is to finish it faithfully.

The believer should labor for crowns without becoming proud of the labor, because every true crown will eventually honor the Lamb. Christ purchased the runner, marked the course, supplied the strength, preserved the truth, and waits at the finish. One day the applause of men will be silent, every earthly trophy will be dust, and every religious reputation will stand beneath perfect judgment. Then a crown from the pierced hand of Jesus Christ will outweigh every treasure the world ever offered. Heaven is free, but the course is costly. Run so that ye may obtain.

9 of 10: Salvation Discipleship and Reward — Saved as by Fire and Empty-Handed Before the King

Key Passage: 1 Corinthians 3:12–15

“Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.”

Introduction

There is a saved man standing in 1 Corinthians 3 with smoke in his clothes and nothing in his hands. His foundation is Jesus Christ, so he cannot be cast away with the lost. His sins were judged at Calvary, his soul was redeemed by the blood, and his eternal life is secured in the Son of God. Yet the work of his Christian life has met the fire, and the fire found nothing worth preserving. His wood, hay, and stubble have burned. His earthly reputation cannot retrieve them, his church membership cannot reconstruct them, and his excuses cannot gather ashes back into a building. Scripture says, “he shall suffer loss,” and then immediately says, “he himself shall be saved.” Religion dislikes that combination because it cannot use the verse to prove either of its favorite extremes. The legalist cannot send the man to hell, and the careless grace preacher cannot pretend he lost nothing.

Eternal security protects the believer from condemnation, but it does not protect wasted years from being wasted. It does not transform buried gifts into faithful service, neglected opportunities into obedience, selfish motives into charity, careless speech into edification, or abandoned assignments into finished courses. Grace secures the man because Christ’s work is perfect; reward examines the man’s labor because his work may be worthless. A Christian may be eternally saved by another Man’s righteousness and still stand unrewarded because his own earthly life was poured into things the fire could not preserve. The blood keeps him from the lake of fire, but the blood does not turn his haystack into a gold mine.

The possibility of arriving before Christ empty-handed should sober every believer who has confused security with immunity from consequence. The Lord will eventually wipe away all tears, but Revelation 21 does not say there will be nothing at the Judgment Seat worth regretting. First John 2:28 warns believers to abide in Christ so that they may “not be ashamed before him at his coming.” Second John 8 warns of losing what has been wrought and failing to receive “a full reward.” Revelation 3:11 warns that a crown can be taken. These are not threats of hell; they are warnings addressed to people whose eternal

relationship does not remove the possibility of shame and forfeiture. A Christian can reach heaven safely while reaching Christ's Judgment Seat poorly.

1. The Man Is Saved Because the Foundation Is Christ

First Corinthians 3:11 establishes the foundation before discussing the fire: "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." The believer's eternal security rests upon the person and work of the Son of God. Jesus Christ bore the sinner's sins, shed the blood of redemption, rose bodily from the dead, and supplies His righteousness to the one who believes. The foundation is not the Christian's faithfulness, moral consistency, ministry record, or ability to finish well. Those things concern what is built upon the foundation. The foundation itself is Christ, and no fire can reveal a defect in Him.

This is why the believer whose works burn remains saved. His salvation does not rest upon the quality of his works. Romans 4:5 says that God justifies "him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly." Ephesians 2:8–9 declares salvation to be the gift of God and "Not of works." The believer's good works may earn reward, and his worthless works may suffer loss, but neither result changes the finished righteousness in which he stands. If gold, silver, and precious stones helped preserve salvation, grace would become wages. If wood, hay, and stubble canceled salvation, everlasting life would become temporary life with a religious inspection clause.

The words "he himself shall be saved" ought to end the argument, but religion has never allowed a plain statement to interfere with an inherited system. Some declare that the man is merely a professor escaping hell at the last second, although the passage places him upon Christ's foundation and calls him saved. Others invent purgatory, moving the fire from the works to the believer and charging surviving relatives for shorter burn time. Paul says nothing of the sort. The man's works burn, the man suffers loss, and the man remains saved. The verse is not difficult; it is simply inconvenient to anyone whose theology requires salvation to be either insecure or inconsequential.

2. Wasted Years Will Not Become Treasure Merely Because the Believer Is Secure

Ephesians 5:15–16 commands, "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Time is one of God's most severe forms of stewardship because it cannot be stored for later, recovered after neglect, or borrowed from another believer. Money lost may be regained, possessions replaced, and relationships sometimes restored, but yesterday cannot be reopened for additional obedience. Every day leaves the believer's hands and enters the permanent record. The

fool lives as though time were an unlimited government program; wisdom reads the expiration date.

A Christian may waste years without committing the kinds of scandalous sins that make church bulletins nervous. He can waste life through spiritual laziness, constant distraction, worldly ambition, harmless amusements pursued without measure, endless religious argument, fear of man, and continual postponement of known duty. He may stay out of bars while spending every free hour before a screen, avoid adultery while giving his deepest affection to the world, and maintain a respectable testimony while never doing the work God assigned. Wood, hay, and stubble do not all come wrapped in public disgrace. Much of it looks clean, safe, socially acceptable, and completely useless.

Romans 13:11 warns, “now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.” The believer’s completed redemption draws nearer, and the opportunity for earthly service grows shorter. The Christian who continually plans to become faithful later is writing checks against days God never promised to deposit. James says life is “a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:14). A vapour can glorify God, but only if it stops pretending it has the lifespan of a mountain.

3. Buried Abilities Will Be Examined as Neglected Stewardship

Every believer has received opportunities, abilities, resources, knowledge, and some capacity for service. First Peter 4:10 says, “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards.” A steward does not own what has been placed in his care. He manages another person’s property according to the owner’s purpose. The believer’s mind, body, voice, time, influence, experience, possessions, and spiritual ability belong to the One who bought him. First Corinthians 6:20 says, “For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.” The Christian does not own himself merely because the world taught him to admire the phrase.

A gift may be buried through fear, laziness, comparison, false humility, or resentment over receiving a smaller assignment than somebody else. One believer refuses to serve because he cannot serve publicly. Another will not teach ten people because he envies the man teaching hundreds. Another says he has no ability while spending years developing every ability except the one needed for God’s work. Still another mistakes reluctance for humility and waits for an engraved invitation from an angel. God does not require the servant to possess another man’s talent; He requires faithfulness with what He placed in that servant’s hand.

Romans 12 presents differing gifts and commands believers to use them according to the grace given. Ministry should minister, teaching should teach, exhortation should exhort, giving should be done with simplicity, ruling with diligence, and mercy with cheerfulness. The body does not need every member to become an eye or a mouth. It needs every member to function where God placed him. A Christian who refuses his appointed function does not injure only himself; he deprives other members of what God intended to supply through him. Buried ability gathers no heavenly interest.

4. Neglected Opportunities and Abandoned Assignments Will Not Be Forgotten

Paul told Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it" (Colossians 4:17). The ministry had been received "in the Lord," but it still required attention and fulfillment. Divine calling does not cancel human responsibility. God may open the door, supply the truth, provide the opportunity, and equip the servant, yet the believer must walk through, speak, labor, and finish. An unopened opportunity is not obedience merely because the Christian prayed about it for six months.

Paul's own testimony provides the opposite example. Near death he said, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). He did not merely begin with enthusiasm and retire when opposition became inconvenient. He finished the course given to him. That course included prisons, beatings, shipwrecks, hunger, betrayal, sleeplessness, and abandonment, yet none of those circumstances excused desertion. Paul knew that the assignment came from the risen Christ and that the final report would be delivered to Him.

Abandoned assignments often wear respectable explanations. A preacher softens the message to preserve attendance, a teacher stops teaching because gratitude is scarce, a witness becomes silent because rejection is unpleasant, and a servant leaves his post because somebody failed to recognize him. The flesh can manufacture an entire filing cabinet of reasons for quitting. Christ will examine whether the reason was obedience or self-preservation. Men may applaud a strategic retreat, but heaven can still call it desertion.

5. Selfish Motives and Careless Words Will Face Perfect Examination

First Corinthians 4:5 says that the Lord "will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts." The Judgment Seat examines the reason behind the work as well as the work itself. Two men may preach the same text, give the same amount, perform the same service, or suffer the same criticism while building with different materials. One acts through charity and obedience; the other acts through

envy, vanity, competition, guilt, or hunger for recognition. Men see matching deeds. Christ sees different hearts.

Religious work is particularly vulnerable to corrupt motive because it offers the flesh a chance to appear spiritual. A man may pray to be admired, preach to be praised, give to control, suffer to gain sympathy, and defend truth to advertise his own boldness. He may speak of sacrifice while keeping careful records of who thanked him. Jesus warned about men who performed righteous acts “to be seen of men” and said, “They have their reward” (Matthew 6:2). Human applause may be the only payment received when a man intentionally selects men as his audience.

Words also form part of the believer’s stewardship. Ephesians 4:29 commands, “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying.” Colossians 4:6 says, “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt.” Careless speech can wound believers, damage reputations, spread falsehood, feed division, flatter sin, and waste opportunities to speak truth. The tongue is small enough to hide behind the teeth but powerful enough to set a church on fire. A Christian may spend years building a testimony and destroy much of its usefulness with a few undisciplined sentences.

6. Shame and Loss Are Real Without Becoming Eternal Condemnation

First John 2:28 tells believers, “And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.” John addresses “little children,” not lost men trying to become children. The alternatives are confidence and shame before Christ. Shame does not mean the believer is thrown into hell, but neither is it an imaginary discomfort erased before it can be felt. The verse assumes that a believer’s manner of life can affect how he meets the Lord.

Second John 8 adds, “Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.” A full reward may become a diminished reward. Revelation 3:11 warns, “hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” These warnings have force only if real forfeiture is possible. The careless teacher who says every believer receives the same reward has not magnified grace; he has erased words God deliberately placed in the Bible. A race with no prize, no disqualification, no loss, and no difference between finishing and quitting is not a race. It is a church picnic with matching shirts.

Revelation 21:4 promises that God will eventually wipe away all tears, but that occurs after the judgments, the millennial kingdom, the final rebellion, the Great White Throne, and the arrival of the new heaven and new earth. The wiping away of tears does not prove that no

tears were shed. Nor does eternal joy require eternal ignorance of squandered stewardship. God can remove sorrow without declaring that every Christian life was equally faithful. Grace may heal the wound, but it does not rewrite the earthly record and label every scar a medal.

7. The Empty Hand Can Still Be Filled While the Course Remains Open

The warning of loss is not written to produce hopelessness but urgency. As long as the believer remains alive, the construction site remains open. He cannot recover every wasted year or recreate every neglected opportunity, but he can stop adding stubble. He can confess sin, return to obedience, reclaim neglected duty, repair what can be repaired, and begin redeeming the time that remains. Paul said, “forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark” (Philippians 3:13–14). The past cannot be changed, but it does not have to own the future.

The Christian must labor in dependence upon grace rather than attempting to compensate for wasted years through frantic religious motion. Paul said, “by the grace of God I am what I am,” and then testified, “I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10). Grace did not make him idle, and labor did not make him self-sufficient. Proper Christian service joins diligent effort with complete dependence upon God. The believer works heartily while remembering that Christ supplies the life, power, opportunity, truth, and increase.

First Corinthians 15:58 commands, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.” The promise follows: “forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.” Labor performed “in the Lord” survives. Men may overlook it, circumstances may interrupt it, and earthly results may appear small, but Christ does not forget. The safest way to avoid empty hands before the King is to fill the present hour with what He actually commanded.

Conclusion

A believer can be saved as by fire and stand empty-handed before Jesus Christ. His eternal life remains secure because his foundation is Christ, but his earthly work may burn because it lacked truth, obedience, charity, faithfulness, or proper motive. Wasted years remain wasted, buried abilities remain unused, neglected opportunities remain absent from the record of obedience, and abandoned assignments remain unfinished. Salvation does not turn ashes into treasure. It preserves the man while the ashes testify against his stewardship.

This truth must be defended against both religious extremes. The legalist uses loss to deny eternal security and ignores the words “he himself shall be saved.” The careless grace

teacher uses security to deny meaningful loss and ignores the words “he shall suffer loss.” God wrote both truths together. The believer is secure enough that failure cannot cast him into hell and accountable enough that failure can follow him to the Judgment Seat. Grace is stronger than legalism admits and more demanding than carnality desires.

No Christian needs to arrive empty-handed. The time remaining may be shorter than the time wasted, but God has not asked the believer to serve yesterday. He commands faithfulness today. The Christian can stop collecting stubble, take heed to his ministry, redeem the time, discipline his speech, purify his motive, use his gift, and finish his course. Christ has already guaranteed the believer’s arrival through His own perfect work. The question is whether the believer will arrive carrying anything that survives the fire.

10 of 10: Salvation Discipleship and Reward — Entering the Kingdom and Inheriting the Kingdom Are Not Identical

Key Passage: Colossians 3:23–25

“And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.”

Introduction

Birth and inheritance belong to the same family, but they are not the same event. A child enters a family by birth; he does not labor, suffer, endure, or perform household duties in order to become the child who was born. Once inside that family, however, conduct, maturity, obedience, responsibility, and faithfulness can affect what is entrusted to him. The Bible uses that familiar distinction to explain truths religion habitually throws into one doctrinal bucket. Salvation brings the believing sinner into God’s family by the new birth. Discipleship concerns how that child follows and serves his Lord. Reward and inheritance concern what the faithful servant receives when his work is examined. A birth certificate is not a performance review, and an inheritance is not an obstetrical procedure. Religion mixes the paperwork and then blames the Bible because the filing cabinet looks confused.

The New Testament promises the believer an unchangeable position in Jesus Christ while issuing serious warnings about inheritance, crown, reigning, loss, and reward. Those warnings must not be converted into denials of eternal security, but neither may they be reduced to harmless religious gestures. A believer may be secure in the family while

forfeiting aspects of inheritance connected with obedience and service. He may enter eternity because Christ saved him and yet lose honors he might have possessed in Christ's coming kingdom. First Corinthians 3:15 gives the controlling distinction: "he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." The man is saved, yet the loss is real. Eternal security preserves the relationship; it does not erase the accounting.

This concluding truth completes the distinction running through the entire series. Salvation is free because Jesus Christ paid its entire cost. Discipleship is costly because the believer must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow a rejected Saviour. Reward is earned because God judges faithful service and recompenses the believer according to his labor. Mix those three, and two counterfeit messages appear. One burdens salvation with works until the gift becomes a wage. The other strips the Christian life of accountability until grace becomes an excuse for uselessness. The first produces frightened believers who never know whether Christ has kept them; the second produces comfortable believers who never ask whether they have pleased Him.

1. The New Birth Places the Believer Into God's Family

John 1:12–13 says, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Sonship comes through receiving Jesus Christ by faith. It does not arise from natural ancestry, human determination, religious ceremony, church membership, moral reform, sacrificial service, or endurance. The believer is born "of God." The Father performs the begetting, the Holy Spirit performs the regenerating operation, and the word of God supplies the incorruptible seed. The sinner does not assist with his own spiritual delivery.

Galatians 3:26 confirms, "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." The verse does not say that men become children through faithfully occupying their place in the kingdom. Faith establishes the relationship before Christian service begins. Ephesians first declares the believer saved by grace, accepted in the beloved, redeemed through Christ's blood, and sealed with the Spirit; only afterward does it command him to walk worthy of his calling. God does not order dead sinners to demonstrate enough life to earn a birth. He gives life in Christ and then commands the living man to walk accordingly.

This birth cannot be reversed by poor discipleship. A disobedient child may grieve his father, lose fellowship, suffer chastening, bring shame upon the family, and forfeit privilege, but he does not cease to have been born. The believer is sealed "unto the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30), and his life is "hid with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3).

Jesus promised, “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish” (John 10:28). A son may require the woodshed, but the woodshed is not an orphanage.

2. Being an Heir of God and Sharing Christ’s Reign Are Distinct

Romans 8:16 says, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” Verse 17 continues, “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God.” The first inheritance flows directly from sonship. Galatians 4:7 agrees: “Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.” The believer possesses his standing and eternal relationship through Christ. He does not become an heir of God by outperforming other Christians or surviving a sufficient amount of hardship.

Romans 8:17 then adds, “and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” The condition concerns suffering with Christ and shared glory. The verse does not require suffering to become a child; the Spirit has already testified that the believers addressed are children. It connects faithful identification with Christ’s rejection to participation in His glory. Every believer belongs to Christ, but not every believer has stood with Christ when the cost arrived. Every son possesses family relationship, but Scripture does not promise every son identical royal responsibility.

Second Timothy 2:12 states, “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us.” The context is reigning, not the cancellation of the new birth. The next verse protects the believer’s union with Christ: “If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.” The believer is part of Christ’s body, and Christ cannot deny Himself. Yet He can deny a faithless servant the reigning privilege associated with suffering. The Christian may refuse Christ’s reproach now and discover that Christ refuses him the corresponding honor later. A secure son can still become an unrewarded servant.

3. The Inheritance Warnings Were Written to Believers

First Corinthians 6:9 warns, “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?” Paul lists fornication, idolatry, adultery, theft, covetousness, drunkenness, reviling, and extortion. He then says, “And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified.” The Corinthians possessed a changed position through Christ, yet the epistle reveals serious carnality among them. One man had taken his father’s wife, believers were suing one another, drunkenness had invaded the Lord’s supper, and divisions had torn the congregation. Paul did not declare them unborn; he warned and corrected them as sanctified people whose conduct contradicted their position.

Galatians 5:19–21 lists the works of the flesh and warns, “they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” The people addressed had received the Spirit by the

hearing of faith and were called brethren, yet they remained capable of walking in the flesh. The flesh in a saved man has not been rehabilitated, converted, or improved. It still produces adultery, hatred, strife, envy, drunkenness, and the rest of Adam's rotten crop. The warning therefore carries real force. Carnal conduct can affect inheritance without proving that the Holy Spirit failed to seal the believer.

Ephesians 5:5 says, "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." Paul uses the word "inheritance." He does not say that the blood-bought member of Christ's body becomes unwashed every time the flesh gains a victory. He warns that carnality carries forfeiture. Verse 6 adds, "Let no man deceive you with vain words," because somebody will always arrive with a doctrine designed either to put the believer back under condemnation or to make his sin consequence-free. The Bible refuses both deceptions.

4. Inheriting the Kingdom Concerns Possession Honor and Responsibility

To enter a place and to inherit possessions within that place are not identical. A man may enter his father's estate because he belongs to the family while receiving a portion, responsibility, or position according to his father's judgment. Inheritance carries the idea of possession, allotment, privilege, and assigned interest. Colossians 3:24 calls it "the reward of the inheritance." The words "reward" and "inheritance" appear together because the passage concerns service: "whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord." The believer serves now and receives from the Lord later.

Christ's future kingdom will involve actual government, responsibility, judgment, and authority. First Corinthians 6:2 says, "the saints shall judge the world," while verse 3 adds, "Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" Second Timothy 2 connects suffering with reigning. Revelation 2:26 promises power over the nations to the overcomer who keeps Christ's works, and Revelation 3:21 promises a place with Christ in His throne. These are not merely poetic ways of saying that believers will be happy in heaven. Christ will reign as King of kings, and His faithful servants will occupy real positions beneath His authority.

The kingdom therefore exposes the poverty of the modern notion that heaven consists of endless inactivity on a cloud. God did not redeem a people merely to provide an eternal audience for harp music. Christ is preparing rulers, servants, judges, and faithful stewards for His coming administration. The Christian who refuses every present responsibility should not assume that Christ will greet him with unlimited future responsibility. God trains His servants in the small assignments of this life before placing them over greater matters.

The believer who would not govern his tongue should think twice before demanding government over cities.

5. Carnality Can Forfeit Inheritance Without Canceling Salvation

First Corinthians 3:15 remains the clearest picture: “If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved.” The foundation is Christ; the work belongs to the believer. The foundation stands while the work burns. This distinction allows Scripture to issue severe warnings without contradicting eternal security. The believer can lose reward, crown, inheritance, commendation, and reigning privilege while remaining eternally secure in Jesus Christ. The man is not cast into the fire; his work is tested by it.

Colossians 3:25 warns, “But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.” Grace does not create a favored class of Christians whose wrongdoing God pretends not to see. The Lord can chasten His children in the present life and judge their service at the Judgment Seat. A famous preacher receives no special exemption, and an obscure believer receives no lower standard. Christ does not accept denominational credentials as a coupon for reduced accountability. There is no respect of persons.

This judgment does not repay the believer’s sins with eternal condemnation, for Christ already bore that judgment. It examines conduct for recompense. Second Corinthians 5:10 says believers will “receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” Romans 14:12 says, “every one of us shall give account of himself to God.” The believer cannot transfer that account to his pastor, parents, church, or circumstances. Grace provides a perfect Saviour, not a false alibi.

6. Mixing Salvation and Inheritance Produces Two Counterfeit Messages

The first counterfeit makes inheritance warnings into conditions for receiving or retaining eternal life. Under this arrangement, the sinner begins by believing but must continue performing, enduring, surrendering, and overcoming to prevent spiritual eviction. Salvation becomes a contract with grace in the headline and works in the fine print. Assurance becomes impossible because no honest man can know whether he has endured enough, surrendered enough, or produced enough fruit. The believer’s attention shifts from Christ’s perfect work to his own unstable performance.

That system does not produce true holiness; it produces fear, pride, or hypocrisy. The frightened believer never rests because his salvation depends upon tomorrow’s conduct. The proud believer lowers the standard until his own conduct qualifies and then condemns everyone below his invented line. The hypocrite learns the outward language of perseverance while hiding the failures that would threaten his religious standing. Legalism

advertises humility while constructing a salvation in which man must help Christ keep His promise.

The second counterfeit preaches free salvation while erasing every consequence for Christian conduct. It teaches that because the believer cannot lose eternal life, he cannot meaningfully lose anything. Inheritance becomes an automatic package, crowns become decorative symbols, the Judgment Seat becomes a brief awards ceremony, and every Christian receives the same kingdom honor regardless of faithfulness. That is not grace; it is spiritual socialism imposed upon the righteous Judge. Scripture speaks of full reward, lost reward, crowns gained, crowns forfeited, works abiding, works burning, suffering followed by reigning, and shame before Christ. God did not spend that much ink describing a temporary frown.

7. Salvation Discipleship and Reward Must Remain in Their Proper Order

Salvation answers the sinner's condemnation. He is guilty, dead in trespasses and sins, and unable to justify himself. Jesus Christ died for his sins, was buried, and rose again. The sinner believes on Christ and receives eternal life as the free gift of God. He is justified, regenerated, sealed, accepted, and placed into Christ. No disciple's cross, good work, act of surrender, faithful endurance, or crown contributes to that saving transaction. Christ saves the sinner completely because Christ completed the work.

Discipleship answers the saved man's walk. The believer hears Christ say, "deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). Following costs reputation, comfort, ambition, possessions, relationships, safety, and sometimes physical life. Those sacrifices do not purchase sonship; they demonstrate loyalty to the One who gave it. The disciple carries his cross because Christ already carried the sin-bearing cross he could never bear. Salvation is received in a moment; discipleship is lived across a course.

Reward answers the servant's accounting. The Christian's work will be examined at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Gold, silver, and precious stones will endure; wood, hay, and stubble will burn. Faithful service receives reward, while careless service suffers loss. Crowns, inheritance, commendation, and reigning authority reflect Christ's righteous evaluation. The believer does not serve to remain saved; he serves because he is saved and because the life purchased by Christ deserves more than a pile of ashes.

Conclusion

Entering the family and receiving an inheritance within the kingdom are not identical. The believer becomes God's child by faith in Jesus Christ, but his faithfulness affects reward, crown, inheritance, and reigning responsibility. Birth establishes relationship; conduct affects stewardship. The Father does not disown the child every time he fails, but neither

does He reward rebellion as though it were obedience. Eternal security and meaningful accountability stand together without contradiction because they concern different aspects of the believer's relationship with God.

The inheritance warnings should therefore be allowed to retain their full force. Carnality matters. Abandoned service matters. Suffering refused, truth compromised, gifts buried, time wasted, and opportunities neglected will not become gold merely because the believer is secure. Yet none of those failures can overturn Christ's finished work, break the Spirit's seal, or convert everlasting life into temporary life. The believer may arrive securely and receive poorly. He may enter eternity through another Man's righteousness while forfeiting honors connected with his own unfaithful stewardship.

The three doors must remain properly labeled. Salvation is free because Christ paid for it. Discipleship is costly because self must be denied. Reward is earned because faithful service is judged. Put discipleship conditions on salvation, and the gift acquires a price tag. Remove reward and loss from discipleship, and the Christian life becomes a playground without consequences. The blood determines the believer's eternal destination; the cross-bearing walk shapes his present course; the Judgment Seat determines what survives. Religion painted the doors the same color, but the King James Bible left the labels where an honest man can read them.

Salvation Discipleship and Reward

Three Truths Religion Keeps Mixing

Series Conclusion

We have reached the end of this series with three doors standing exactly where the King James Bible placed them. One is marked **salvation**, another **discipleship**, and the third **reward**. Religion painted them the same color, removed the signs, and then spent centuries writing books about why people keep walking into the wrong rooms. But the confusion disappears when the words of God are permitted to speak without denominational assistance. Salvation concerns the sinner's eternal standing and is received freely through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Discipleship concerns the believer's earthly walk and demands self-denial, obedience, separation, sacrifice, endurance, and cross-bearing. Reward concerns the believer's future examination before Christ and is granted according to faithful labor. Salvation is a gift, discipleship is a cost, and reward is a recompense. A man may connect those truths because they belong to one

Christian life, but he has no more right to mix them than a judge has to confuse birth certificates, employment records, and property deeds merely because one man's name appears on all three.

The foundation of everything is Jesus Christ. "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11). The sinner does not lay that foundation through repentance, baptism, church membership, moral reform, surrender, endurance, or service. God laid it through the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son. Christ "died for our sins according to the scriptures," was buried, and "rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). He bore our sins in His own body on the tree, became the propitiation for our sins, shed the blood of redemption, and declared from the cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30). If Christ finished the work, the sinner cannot complete it. If the sinner must complete it, Christ did not finish it. A gospel cannot preach both propositions without cutting its own throat.

Eternal life is therefore "the gift of God" through Jesus Christ our Lord. A gift is received, not earned. Romans 4:5 speaks of the man "that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly." Ephesians 2:8-9 says salvation is "not of yourselves," "the gift of God," and "Not of works." Romans 11:6 draws the line with a sword: "if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace." Human merit cannot enter the gospel as a junior partner. Add one saving work, and grace ceases to be grace. Religion may dress that work in water, sacrament, law, perseverance, surrender, or ceremonial lace, but the costume does not change the principle. A price tag hidden beneath a gift bow is still a price tag.

The sinner is saved by believing on Jesus Christ, not by promising that he will become an exemplary disciple. Acts 16:31 says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." John 6:47 says, "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." John 5:24 says that the believer "shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." He does not enter a probationary life that may become everlasting after decades of satisfactory conduct. He "hath everlasting life" and "is passed." God did not choose those words because He needed a theologian to explain why they mean the opposite. Everlasting life that can end was never everlasting, and a salvation that must be continually repurchased was never a gift.

The believer's security rests upon Christ's faithfulness rather than his own. He is accepted in the beloved, made complete in Christ, sealed with the Holy Spirit "unto the day of redemption," and placed into the body of Christ by the operation of God. Jesus said, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish" (John 10:28). The believer is held in the Son's hand and the Father's hand, while his life is "hid with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3).

For him to lose eternal life, the devil would have to break the Father's grip, overpower the Son, unseal the Holy Spirit, tear a member out of Christ's body, reverse regeneration, and persuade God that "never perish" meant "occasionally perish." Religion claims one serious failure can accomplish what all the principalities and powers of hell cannot do.

Eternal security, however, is not God's permission slip for carnality. It is the foundation upon which He commands His children to walk, serve, suffer, fight, labor, and finish. The believer is saved without works but "created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Ephesians 2:10). Titus 3:8 commands those who have believed in God to "be careful to maintain good works." Grace brings salvation and then teaches the saved to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. A Christian is not saved by good works, but he certainly was not saved so he could become a sanctified piece of furniture. God did not raise a dead sinner to life so he could spend the remainder of his earthly course admiring the doctrine of resurrection from a reclining position.

Good works belong in the workshop, not the maternity ward. They cannot produce the new birth, justify the ungodly, improve Christ's righteousness, preserve eternal life, or assist the blood. They can glorify God, adorn sound doctrine, benefit men, demonstrate professed faith, advance the gospel, strengthen the saints, and receive reward. Paul removes works from salvation's root, while James demands them in faith's fruit. Abraham was counted righteous when he believed God in Genesis 15, years before offering Isaac in Genesis 22. The later work displayed the faith already present. God saw the faith; men could see its obedience. Fruit does not create the tree, but the absence of fruit makes every claim about the tree practically useless.

Discipleship begins after salvation and confronts the saved man's claim to self-rule. Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). Those words concern coming after Christ, not helping Christ purchase redemption. The disciple's cross is not Calvary's cross. Christ's cross was substitutionary, sin-bearing, redemptive, and entirely sufficient. The Christian's cross concerns identification, obedience, reproach, sacrifice, and death to self-will. Calvary's cross saves the sinner; the disciple's cross tests the saved man. Christ bore one because we could not; we bear the other because He did.

The Christian does not take up his cross to become a son of God. He takes it up because, having become God's son by faith, he chooses to follow the rejected Christ. The cross may cost him reputation, possessions, ambitions, relationships, convenience, safety, freedom, and physical life. None of those sacrifices adds saving merit to the blood. Paul's stripes could not wash away one sin, and a martyr's death cannot improve the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Yet those sacrifices matter in discipleship because obedience that costs

nothing commonly proves worth about the same amount. The world can tolerate a cross displayed as religious decoration; it objects when the cross begins governing a man's decisions.

Christ warned that the man who saves his life will lose it, while the man who loses his life for Christ's sake will find it. That warning does not teach that a believer who protects his comfort loses everlasting life. It teaches that a man can preserve his temporary advantages while wasting his earthly course. A Christian may avoid every difficult stand, costly sacrifice, unpopular truth, and dangerous assignment, reaching the end with an unscarred body and an empty record. Conversely, he may surrender everything the world calls valuable and discover that nothing genuinely given to Christ was finally lost. The world measures life from birth to death; Christ measures beyond the grave. The world calls the cross a loss because the world owns a short ruler.

Suffering with Christ carries consequences for reigning with Christ. Romans 8 identifies believers as children and heirs of God, then connects being joint-heirs with Christ and glorified together with suffering beside Him. Second Timothy 2:12 says, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him." Suffering does not purchase sonship, but it affects shared honor. The believer who refuses every reproach may remain secure in the family while forfeiting royal privilege. The blood determines relationship; faithfulness affects responsibility. A child may bear the family name by birth without being entrusted with authority over the family estate. Even earthly fathers understand that distinction, though theology occasionally requires three committees and a revised translation to avoid it.

Not all suffering qualifies as suffering with Christ. A man may suffer because of foolishness, pride, sin, neglect, quarrelsomeness, or criminal conduct. First Peter warns believers not to suffer as murderers, thieves, evildoers, or busybodies. A Christian who experiences consequences for acting like a religious porcupine should not call the discomfort persecution. Suffering with Christ arises from faithful identification with truth, holiness, gospel witness, and obedience. It is borne in Christ's spirit rather than fleshly retaliation. Courage is not carnality carrying a Bible, and needless offensiveness is not the fellowship of His sufferings.

The Judgment Seat of Christ stands at the end of the believer's earthly course. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:10). This is not the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20, where the unsaved dead are judged before the lake of fire. The believer's eternal condemnation was settled at Calvary, and "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). The Judgment Seat examines the Christian's service, stewardship, conduct, opportunity,

motive, and faithfulness. Salvation removes condemnation; it does not remove examination.

First Corinthians 3 places six materials upon the foundation: gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, and stubble. The fire will try every man's work "of what sort it is." Heaven's examination concerns quality rather than publicity. Men count crowds, buildings, money, followers, books, programs, sermons, titles, baptisms, and applause. Christ examines truth, motive, obedience, charity, sacrifice, and spiritual substance. One costly act of hidden obedience may outweigh years of religious activity performed for self-promotion. A wagonload of hay looks larger than a pocketful of diamonds until someone strikes a match.

The fire will expose "the counsels of the hearts" (1 Corinthians 4:5). Men can perform the same outward work for entirely different reasons. One preaches to magnify Christ; another preaches to magnify himself. One gives through charity; another gives to purchase influence. One stands for truth because Scripture requires it; another enjoys the reputation of being the only courageous man in the county. The flesh can pray for admiration, preach for applause, suffer for sympathy, and boast about humility before lunch. Men see the deed; Christ sees the machinery beneath it.

If the believer's work abides, "he shall receive a reward." If it burns, "he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (1 Corinthians 3:14–15). Those words hold eternal security and accountability together. The man is saved because his foundation is Jesus Christ. His works burn because they failed the test. Legalism reads "he shall suffer loss" and throws the man into hell. Careless Christianity reads "he himself shall be saved" and pretends the man lost nothing. God wrote both clauses in one verse so that neither crowd could tell the truth without contradicting its favorite error.

The saved man standing amid ashes is one of the most sobering figures in the New Testament. His arrival is secure, but his hands are empty. Christ's work brought him safely home, while his own earthly work produced nothing that endured. Eternal security protected him from condemnation but did not protect wasted years from being wasted, buried ability from remaining unused, neglected opportunities from disappearing, selfish motives from exposure, or abandoned assignments from judgment. Salvation does not turn ashes into treasure. Grace preserves the man while the ashes testify against his stewardship.

This explains the reality of crowns. The New Testament speaks of an incorruptible crown associated with disciplined striving, a crown of rejoicing connected with souls, a crown of life for enduring temptation, a crown of glory for faithful shepherding, and a crown of righteousness for loving Christ's appearing. These crowns are not carnival prizes

distributed for church attendance. Paul said, “So run, that ye may obtain” (1 Corinthians 9:24). Salvation puts the believer into the race; disciplined faithfulness affects the prize. A birth certificate gets a man into the family record, but it does not place a medal around his neck.

Crowns can be gained, guarded, and forfeited. Christ warns, “hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown” (Revelation 3:11). Second John 8 warns believers not to lose what they have wrought but to receive “a full reward.” Paul kept his body under lest, after preaching to others, he should become a castaway—disapproved for the prize, not cast into hell. Eternal life cannot be stolen because it is hidden with Christ in God, but a Christian may allow another person, false doctrine, carnal appetite, worldly ambition, or fear of man to influence him into forfeiting reward. The devil cannot remove the believer from Christ’s hand, so he tries to leave that believer with nothing worth placing at Christ’s feet.

Inheritance also must be kept distinct from sonship. A child enters a family through birth; inheritance concerns possession, responsibility, and privilege within that family. Romans 8 says believers are children and heirs of God, then connects joint-heirship and shared glory with suffering beside Christ. Colossians 3:24 speaks of “the reward of the inheritance.” Second Timothy 2 connects suffering with reigning. First Corinthians 6 says the saints will judge the world and angels. The coming kingdom is not an eternal retirement village where every believer receives identical responsibility regardless of earthly faithfulness. Christ is preparing servants for actual government beneath His authority.

The inheritance warnings in First Corinthians 6, Galatians 5, and Ephesians 5 must therefore retain their force. Carnality can cost a believer kingdom inheritance without reversing regeneration. The saved man who lives in the works of the flesh does not improve his standing by pretending the warnings apply only to someone else. Neither should he conclude that every fleshly failure removes him from Christ’s body. God can chasten a son, withhold privilege, deny reigning honor, diminish reward, and expose shame without denying paternity. A righteous Father does not abandon His children, but neither does He reward rebellion as if it were obedience.

First John 2:28 warns believers to abide in Christ so they may have confidence and “not be ashamed before him at his coming.” Shame before Christ is not the lake of fire, but it is not meaningless either. Second John warns of lost reward, Revelation warns of a lost crown, First Corinthians warns of burned work, and Colossians says the wrongdoer will receive for the wrong done. Scripture never says every Christian will meet Christ with equal confidence, receive equal commendation, or occupy equal responsibility. Tears will

eventually be wiped away, but that promise does not prove there was nothing worth weeping over at the Judgment Seat.

The two counterfeit messages exposed throughout this series must be rejected together. The first is salvation burdened with human works. It tells the sinner to believe, surrender, reform, endure, obey, suffer, and perform well enough to keep Christ from losing him. That message turns assurance inward. Instead of looking to the blood, the believer inspects his own surrender; instead of resting upon Christ's righteousness, he evaluates his fruit; instead of trusting the Shepherd's hand, he measures the strength of his own grip. Legalism claims to exalt holiness while quietly making human performance part of redemption.

The second counterfeit is a Christian life stripped of accountability. It teaches that because salvation cannot be lost, nothing important can be lost. Discipleship becomes optional, warnings become theatrical, crowns become automatic, and the Judgment Seat becomes an awards banquet where everybody receives the same trophy. That message turns grace into a padded cell for carnality. It has a Saviour strong enough to keep the believer but a Judge too weak to evaluate him. Biblical grace is better than both counterfeits. It saves freely, keeps eternally, teaches holiness, chastens disobedience, demands service, and rewards faithfulness.

The proper order remains fixed. Salvation: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Discipleship: "deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." Reward: "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward." Faith receives the gift. Self-denial embraces the path. Faithful labor obtains the prize. The sinner is justified without works, the believer is created unto good works, and the servant's works are judged for reward. No contradiction remains when each truth is left in its own biblical category.

For the unsaved sinner, the message is not "try harder." It is not "become a disciple first," "clean up your life," "join the right church," or "promise God you will never fail." The message is that Jesus Christ died for your sins, was buried, and rose again. Believe on Him. Stop attempting to pay a debt already paid in blood. Stop offering filthy rags beside the righteousness of God. Christ does not need your assistance; you need His salvation. Come empty-handed, because grace has no pocket for human merit.

For the saved believer, the message is not "sit down and wait for heaven." You were bought with a price. Your body belongs to God, your time belongs to God, your gifts belong to God, your opportunities belong to God, and your earthly course is moving rapidly toward Christ's examination. Take up your cross. Follow the rejected Saviour. Maintain good works. Endure

hardness. Resist the flesh. Use your gift. Redeem the time. Finish your course. Hold fast your crown. Labor so that what you build will survive the fire.

The believer should not serve from fear that Christ may cast him away, but from gratitude that Christ never will. He should not labor to preserve eternal life, but because eternal life has given his temporary life eternal purpose. He should not seek crowns to decorate himself, but to possess something worthy of laying before the Lamb. Revelation 4 shows crowns cast before the throne while heaven declares, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power." Every true reward finally magnifies the One whose grace made the labor possible. Christ supplies the life, calling, truth, strength, opportunity, and increase; the faithful believer simply refuses to bury what the Master placed in his hands.

The Christian life is not a payment toward salvation. It is a response to salvation. The cross is not an addition to the blood. It is the path of the blood-bought disciple. The crown is not an improvement upon eternal life. It is Christ's recognition of faithful stewardship. The inheritance is not a second new birth. It is a kingdom possession granted beneath the judgment of the King. When those distinctions remain clear, grace is preserved without making holiness optional, assurance is secured without making accountability imaginary, and reward is preached without corrupting the gospel.

One day faith will become sight, the race will end, the building site will close, the trumpet will sound, and every believer will stand before Jesus Christ. At that moment, denominational explanations will not matter. The religious paint will peel from the three doors, every excuse will die in the throat that formed it, and the words of God will remain exactly as they were written. The foundation will stand because Christ cannot fail. The work will be tried because Christ cannot lie. The faithful will receive reward because Christ cannot forget, and the unfaithful will suffer loss because Christ cannot call stubble gold.

Salvation is free because Jesus Christ paid for it. Discipleship is costly because the believer must deny himself. Reward is earned because the righteous Judge examines faithful service. Keep the gift out of the marketplace, keep the disciple's cross away from Calvary's payment, and keep the Christian's work headed toward the fire with something in it that can survive. The blood settles where you will spend eternity. Your walk determines whether your earthly life follows Christ or serves self. The Judgment Seat reveals what that life was worth. Religion mixed the three truths, but the King James Bible separated them with a line of fire.

SALVATION, DISCIPLESHIP, AND REWARD

THREE TRUTHS RELIGION KEEPS MIXING

Ephesians 2:8-10 • Luke 9:23 • 1 Corinthians 3:11-15

CENTRAL TRUTH

Salvation is the free gift received by faith.
Discipleship is the costly walk of the believer.
Reward is Christ's recompense for faithful service.
Mixing them corrupts grace and erases accountability.

"he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." — 1 Corinthians 3:15

A SALVATION — THE FREE GIFT

- Question: What must I do to be saved?
- Answer: Believe on Jesus Christ.
- Basis: Christ's finished work and blood.
- Recipient: The believing sinner.
- Cost to sinner: Free; Christ paid all.
- Result: Justified, born again, sealed.
- Key texts: Acts 16:31; Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9; John 5:24.

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."
— Acts 16:31

B DISCIPLESHIP — THE COSTLY WALK

- Question: How should the saved man follow?
- Answer: Deny self, take up the cross, follow.
- Basis: Love, obedience, surrender.
- Subject: The believer's earthly walk.
- Cost: Comfort, ambition, approval, even life.
- Result: Fellowship, usefulness, suffering with Christ.
- Key texts: Luke 9:23; Luke 14:27,33; Romans 12:1; Philippians 3:8.

"take up his cross daily, and follow me." — Luke 9:23

C REWARD — THE FUTURE RECOMPENSE

- Question: What will Christ reward?
- Answer: Faithful service that survives the fire.
- Basis: Labor, motive, stewardship, endurance.
- Place: Judgment Seat of Christ.
- Possible result: Reward or real loss.
- Salvation remains secure.
- Key texts: 1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 John 8.

"If any man's work abide...he shall receive a reward."
— 1 Corinthians 3:14

1 THREE DOORS — THREE QUESTIONS

- Gift received; cross carried; price obtained.
- Do not merge standing, walk, and recompense.

2 CALVARY'S CROSS

- Christ alone bore sin.
- 1 Peter 2:24; Hebrews 10:12; John 19:30.
- Finished, substitutionary, saving.

3 THE CHRISTIAN'S CROSS

- Self-denial and identification with a rejected Christ.
- Luke 9:23; Galatians 2:20.
- Costly but not atoning.

4 GOOD WORKS IN THEIR PLACE

- Not the cause of birth; the fruit of life.
- Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:5,8.
- "Not of works" then "unto good works."

5 LOSING LIFE — NOT ETERNAL LIFE

- A believer may waste or surrender his earthly course without undoing everlasting life.
- Matthew 16:24-27; John 10:28.

6 SUFFERING AND REIGNING

- Children by faith; reigning privilege connected with faithful suffering.
- Romans 8:16-18; 2 Timothy 2:11-13.

7 THE JUDGMENT SEAT

- Every believer gives account, not the Great White Throne.
- Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10.

8 THE SIX BUILDING MATERIALS

- Gold, silver, precious stones endure.
- Wood, hay, stubble burn.
- The fire tests "of what sort it is."
- 1 Corinthians 3:12-15.

FIVE CROWNS

- Incorruptible — 1 Corinthians 9:25
- Rejoicing — 1 Thessalonians 2:19
- Life — James 1:12
- Glory — 1 Peter 5:4
- Righteousness — 2 Timothy 4:8

9

Taf'waf-i calligraphist mushtashan coynonyms. Dolk, ceynams, tuf'fep ne diler e shere heratery. Beld life, pishpheen of respites thee racoonhage. Lye hlokeer shirey sh the thote. only flites the cross. The dafion ans shod linceney, or sine hof-7. And hurey p the mind thee this shoote uphoses.

C WHAT THE BELIEVER MUST DO

- Believe the gospel — Acts 16:31
- Reckon the old man dead — Romans 6:11
- Walk worthy — Ephesians 4:1
- Take up the cross — Luke 9:23
- Serve heartily — Colossians 3:23
- Build carefully — 1 Corinthians 3:10
- Hold fast the crown — Revelation 3:11
- Finish the course — 2 Timothy 4:7

D WHAT CAN AND CANNOT BE LOST

CANNOT BE LOST	CAN BE LOST
• Eternal life • Sonship • Sealing • Position in Christ John 10:28; Ephesians 4:30; Colossians 3:3.	• Fellowship • Usefulness • Opportunities • Reward • Crown • Reigning privilege 1 Corinthians 3:15; 2 John 8; Revelation 3:11; 2 Timothy 2:12.

A DOCTRINAL FLOW

Condemed Sinner (Romans 3:23) → Believes the Gospel (Acts 16:31) → Saved and Sealed (Ephesians 1:13) → Walks and Serves (Ephesians 4:1) → Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) → Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10) → Reward or Loss (1 Corinthians 3:14-15) → Kingdom Service (2 Timothy 2:12)

B TWO OPPOSITE ERRORS — ONE BIBLE BALANCE

LEGALISM	BIBLE BALANCE	CARELESS GRACE
• Adds discipling and works to salvation. • Produces fear; corrupts grace. • Galatians 3:3; Romans 11:6.	• Salvation is free; discipleship is costly; reward is earned. • Ephesians 2:8-10.	• Uses security to erase conduct, loss, and reward. • Produces uselessness. • Romans 6:1-2; Titus 2:11-12.

THE BLOOD SETTLES YOUR DESTINATION. THE CROSS-BEARING WALK SHAPES YOUR COURSE. THE FIRE REVEALS WHAT YOUR LIFE WAS WORTH.