

THE WORD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The Kingdom Reward

The title of this new section of *Affirmation & Critique* is taken from the Epistle to the Hebrews: “Everyone who partakes of milk is inexperienced in the word of righteousness” (5:13). In contrast to “the word of the beginning of Christ” (6:1), which is limited to “the rudiments of the beginning of the oracles of God” (5:12), the word of righteousness embodies and conveys the deeper thought of God’s dispensational and governmental dealings with His people. On the one hand, God saves us by His grace; on the other hand, He deals with us according to His righteousness. Once we have the assurance that we have been saved eternally by the grace of God and have begun to grow in grace, we need to take heed to the word of righteousness, receiving the Father’s discipline unto holiness and submitting to the mighty hand of God.

In this section devoted to various aspects of the word of righteousness, our aim is to present certain little-known biblical truths related to the Christian life under the government of God and to our accountability to Him at the judgment seat of God (Rom. 14:10, 12). We do so with the earnest hope that, regardless of theological persuasion, we all will examine carefully various “heavy” portions of the Word, humble ourselves before the Lord, and calmly and soberly consider our responsibility to Him.

It is our conviction that if we exercise our faculties (Heb. 5:14) to discern what parts of the New Testament may be categorized as the word of righteousness, we will eventually realize that a matter central to God’s governmental dealings with His people is what we may call the kingdom reward—the coming kingdom as a reward to the faithful believers. Salvation is a gift, but the kingdom is a reward. Paul refers to this reward as “the crown of righteousness, with which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will recompense me in that day” (2 Tim. 4:8). This article is a brief introduction to the concept that, according to God’s righteousness, reigning with Christ during the millennial kingdom will be a reward to overcoming believers, not a gift to all believers. At present, it is sufficient simply to propound this idea, leaving detailed development and argumentation for future articles.

Salvation and God’s Purpose

God has saved us “according to His own purpose” (2 Tim.

1:9). It is regrettable that although most believers rejoice in the fact of their salvation, very few know the purpose of their salvation—that salvation is for the fulfillment of God’s eternal purpose to have many sons conformed to the image of the firstborn Son for the corporate expression of the Triune God. Believers who are concerned only with their spiritual self-interest, not for God’s eternal purpose, cannot be used by Him to carry out His economy according to the desire of His heart. Such believers will not receive a positive reward from the Lord Jesus at His coming back. In contrast, those who care not merely for the fact of their personal salvation but mainly for God’s purpose in salvation are likely to become seekers of the Lord and of His truth, willing to abandon themselves to the Lord and to His perfect will (Rom. 12:1-2) and desiring to hear the word of righteousness regarding the kingdom reward. This article is for these seekers.

Saved but Not Receiving the Kingdom Reward

In the New Testament, from Matthew to Revelation, there is a line of thought concerning reward, and we would do well to pay attention to it. In Matthew 5 and 6 the Lord Jesus speaks repeatedly concerning reward (5:12, 46; 6:1-2, 5, 16). In 1 Corinthians 3:8 Paul says, “Each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.” Then in verse 14 he goes on to say, “If anyone’s work which he has built upon the foundation remains, he will receive a reward.” In Revelation 22:12 the Lord Jesus says, “Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me to render to each one as his work is.”

There is a great difference between salvation and reward. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works that no one should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). This clearly and emphatically reveals that eternal salvation is altogether by grace through faith, having nothing to do with our works. Nothing that we have done, are doing, or will do can affect our eternal salvation (a gift) which is absolutely a matter of God’s grace (a gift) through our faith (a gift) in the Lord Jesus. God has imparted to us the ability to believe in the Lord Jesus, and by believing we are saved and have life in His name (Acts 16:31; John 20:31).

Once we have been saved, we cannot be lost; that is, we

cannot suffer eternal perdition. Those who have been saved by grace through faith will never perish (John 10:28-29). Our eternal salvation is forever secured by the will of God, by the selection and calling of God, by the love and grace of God, by the righteousness of God, by the covenant of God, by the power of God, by the life of God, by God Himself, by the redemption of Christ, by the power of Christ, and by the promise of Christ. We have been born of God, and we cannot be unborn. By faith we have been joined to the Lord to become one spirit with Him in a marvelous organic union. This joining and union are eternally secure in the divine life.

Regarding eternal salvation in relation to the kingdom reward, we must avoid extreme theological views. One extreme view insists that we are saved eternally and that we can lose neither our salvation nor the kingdom reward. The other extreme view claims that salvation is conditional upon good behavior and that we can lose both our salvation and the kingdom reward. The truth in the Bible is balanced: eternal salvation is by grace through faith, and it cannot be lost; the kingdom reward involves righteousness and works, and it can be forfeited.

A Reward according to Our Works

Hebrews 10:35 says, “Do not cast away therefore your boldness, which has great reward.” This reward is the kingdom reward, which is something in addition to eternal salvation. Whereas eternal salvation is by grace through faith, having nothing to do with our works, the kingdom reward is given for our work as believers in Christ. According to 1 Corinthians 3:8 we will be rewarded according to our labor, for the Lord will give to us according to our work (Rev. 22:12). Although we are saved, we may not receive the kingdom reward because we are devoid of the work which the Lord can approve (1 Cor. 3:15; Matt. 7:21-23). If we do not labor by the Lord’s all-sufficient grace to carry out His economy (1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 12:9) and if our work does not remain after it has been tried by fire, we will not receive the reward of the kingdom. It is contrary to the Scriptures to teach that all believers will receive the kingdom reward no matter how they live and work after they are saved. The basic truth concerning the kingdom reward is this—receiving the kingdom reward is not a matter of God’s

saving grace but of our subsequent work. If we are faithful servants in this age, we will enjoy the kingdom with the Lord in the coming age (Matt. 25:21, 23). If we are not faithful, we will suffer loss and undergo some kind of dispensational punishment (v. 30).

The kingdom reward will be decided at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10), where the Lord will “bring to light the hidden things of darkness and make manifest the counsels of the hearts” (1 Cor. 4:5). At His coming back, the Lord Jesus will set up His judgment seat and judge all the believers with respect to their life and work. There, at the judgment seat, the decision will be made regarding the kingdom reward, with the Lord, the righteous Judge, determining who will receive the kingdom reward (2 Tim. 4:8). Those who receive this reward will enter into the joy of the Lord and reign with Him as His co-kings, sitting with Him on His throne. This will be the fulfillment of the Lord’s promise in Revelation 3:21: “He who overcomes, to him I will give to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat with My Father on His throne.”

Moses looked away to the kingdom reward (Heb. 11:26) and Paul endeavored to obtain it (1 Cor. 9:24-27). If we are serious with the Lord regarding His eternal purpose and soberminded regarding our responsibility and accountability to the Lord as believers, we also will look to this reward and seek to obtain it. Throughout the course of his Christian life, Paul was running the race for the kingdom reward, not having the assurance that he had laid hold of this reward. Only at the end of his life, immediately before his martyrdom, did he know for certain that the crown of righteousness had been prepared for him and for all who love the Lord’s appearing (2 Tim. 4:7-8). With Paul as our pattern (1 Tim. 1:16), we should run the race set before us, not trusting in ourselves or assuming that all is well simply because we are saved. We may receive the kingdom reward or we may not. For all of us, this matter is pending the Lord’s decision at His judgment seat. The Lord’s word concerning the kingdom reward is serious and weighty. It is truly a word of righteousness.

by Ron Kangas

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