

DOCTRINE

RANKS AND REWARDS

LESSON #18

What are the rewards that believers will receive in heaven? Will there be ranks among believers in heaven? What are ranks? How could there be ranks since God is no respecter of persons? What does the Bible say about these things?

First of all, we know that God is no respecter of persons (Rom. 2:11). We also know that every man will be rewarded according as his work shall be (Rev. 22:12). This fact is shown us in the parable of the sower. The word that was sown on good ground and brought forth fruit did not all bear the same... some brought forth 30-fold, some 60-fold, and some 100-fold. Also the Apostle Paul talks about this in I Cor. 3 where he tells us that every man's work shall be made manifest as to what kind of materials he built with... gold, silver, precious stone; or wood, hay, and stubble. So each one will be rewarded in some manner according as to what kind of a life he lived. Please follow closely as we examine several Scriptures that have to do with ranks and rewards of believers.

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming." (I Cor. 15:22-23). Here we see that every man will be made alive "in his own order." The word "order" means, "Something orderly in arrangement, a troop, a series, or succession." We could say, then, that every man will be made alive in his own "rank." This thought is what Paul had in mind when he said in Phil 3:11, "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of (out from among) the dead." Paul was wanting to attain something here by any means. He could not have been speaking of attaining salvation, for salvation is a free gift (Eph. 2:8-9). He was wanting to attain a "better resurrection" (Heb. 11:35) or one out from among other Christians. This was the "mark" he was pressing toward, as mentioned in Phil. 3:14.

In Revelation 4 and 5, we see two groups of Christians represented by the four beasts and twenty-four elders. These Christians are in heaven before the time of tribulation begins. Their position is in and around the throne of God and of the Lamb. They are engaged in worshipping the Lord and assisting in the judgment of the world. No other Christians are seen going to heaven until chapter 7, where the great multitude from all nations are seen standing before the throne, serving God. These are said to have come "out of great tribulation." Now this great multitude of people will not all be saved during the first few months of the tribulation; rather they include all people who have been saved during this church dispensation and who have lived their lives unto themselves. Yes they are Christians, but Christ does not have that first, or preeminent, place in their lives. They are not willing to fellowship with Christ in His suffering. Therefore, they have lived and died as nominal Christians. They arrive in heaven sometime after the ones seen in chapters 4 and 5. They have different rewards according to the order or rank in which they arrive in heaven.

In studying Revelation, other groups of Christians are seen being taken up to heaven, but for our study of ranks in the church, these two main groups are the ones more involved.

What is the advantage of arriving in heaven in the first rank?

As we noted previously, Paul was striving to attain a better resurrection. He desired this because of the Prize that awaited those who did attain it. "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 3:14). What is that Prize? Phil. 3:8 –

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"Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for Whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." So the Prize is Christ Jesus Himself – not as Saviour – Paul already knew Him as Saviour... but as the Beloved One, yea, even as Bridegroom. So the advantage of being a part of that "first rank" in heaven is glorious. Note Rev. 19:7-8 – "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness (righteous acts) of saints." From these verses we realize that the wife of the Lamb is arrayed in righteous acts... she made herself ready. That is, she is standing here, not only because of being clothed in Christ's righteousness, but because she has walked in that righteousness. She has submitted herself to God and allowed Him to work in her. She is what she is only by the grace of God, but she has allowed the grace of God to change her. Not all of the Church has yielded to God in this way. Therefore not all of the Church will share in Christ's glory as His wife.

The analogy of husband and wife concerning Christ and the Church is given in Eph. 5:25-33. Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it, "That He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." (vs. 27). "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church." (vs. 31-32). Your question here might be, how can there be different ranks in the Church when this Scripture indicates that the whole Church is Christ's bride? Just as it is true that Jesus died for the whole world, but only those individuals who believe and accept His salvation will be saved... even so Jesus desires to present the whole Church to Himself, holy and without blemish, to reign with Him on His throne as His bride, but only those individual Christians who suffer with Him and allow Him to wash out all spots and wrinkles of their lives, will be in that group of Christians who become His bride and will enjoy the glory with Him in the fullest degree. This group will arrive in heaven first, as the first rank. The sleepy, worldly Christian will arrive in heaven sometime later and will make up the second rank. They are seen in Rev. 7 as the great multitude which cannot be numbered, and they are before the throne, serving the Lord, in contrast to the overcomers who are on the throne with Christ.

Continuing the same thought of Christ and His bride, we read a warning in II Cor. 11:2-3. "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one Husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." It is possible to be beguiled by Satan and thus not be presented to Christ as a chaste virgin. Therefore we are warned to watch and be ready (Matt. 24:42-44).

These Christians who are seated with Christ on His throne are reigning as "joint-heirs" with Him, as noted in Rom. 8:16-17. "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." All Christians are heirs of God, but notice the "if" attached to those being joint-heirs with Christ. "...if so be that we suffer with Him..." II Tim. 2:12 – "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him: if we deny Him, He also will deny us." That is, if we deny Him the right to change our lives through suffering, then He will deny us the right to reign with Him. Study I Peter 4 and 5 and note how closely suffering and glory are connected (especially 4:13).

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In I Cor. 9:24-25 we read that many run on a racecourse, but only one received the prize. The one that wins is one who has run, not uncertainly, but has disciplined himself and brought himself into subjection to the will of God. The apostle Paul was running on this racecourse, keeping his body under, racing towards that goal of Phil. 3:12 (out-resurrection) so that he might win the Prize, being joint-heirs with Christ. If we do not run patiently and certainly on this racecourse that is set before us, we become sleepy and indifferent concerning the coming of the Lord. We are warned about this in I Thess. 5:1-9. Notice especially the pronouns in these verses. "For yourselves (Christians) know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they (sinners) shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us (Christians) not sleep, as do others (sinners); but let us watch and be sober." It is obvious that Paul is saying here that it is possible for Christians to be sleeping when Christ comes, just as sinners will be, and he is warning us to stay awake.

Staying awake concerning His coming is what Paul meant in II Tim. 4:7-8. Note that he says here that a crown of righteousness is laid up for him "...and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing." Do all Christians love His appearing? Many, many Christians are thinking only of themselves, and they will not qualify for that crown that is laid up for Paul. Therefore their "order" of resurrection will be sometime following that of the groups that we saw in Rev. 4. They will be servants of the Lord, instead of joint-heirs with Him, reigning in and around His throne, enjoying His fellowship as a bride does her Bridegroom.

The Lord told the Philadelphia church in Rev. 3:11, "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." Jesus addressed this Philadelphia church, "...These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it..." Here again we have the thought of reigning with Christ. The key of David would speak of the key to the throne room, even as been prophesied of Christ that He, as David's seed, would reign forever (Luke 1:33). And Jesus has opened the door to this throne room to those of the Philadelphia church, which church is a type of Christians who are completely yielded to God's will. It is up to them... they can walk in, or not... but the sharing with Him in the glory of the throne room is preceded by the sharing... sharing with Him in His sufferings (Phil. 3:10). Notice it is this Philadelphia church which received the promise to be kept out of the hour of temptation, which is the seven years tribulation period. They will arrive in heaven before the tribulation begins because they have "...kept the word of My patience..."

There are many types of the truth of ranks all through the Bible. Some of these are: Eve was made from a part of Adam's body, just as Christ's bride will be from a part of His body, the Church. Abraham (type of God) sent Eliezer (type of the Holy Spirit) to seek a bride for Isaac (type of Christ). He chose Rebekah... only one of her family. Enoch was translated because he pleased God. Of the twelve spies of Israel that were sent to spy out the land of Canaan, only two, Joshua and Caleb, believed God and were able to enter the land. The "king's daughter" of Psalms 45:13-14 is a beautiful picture of the bride of Christ. The Shulamite in the Song of Solomon stands out from the "daughters of Jerusalem" as the overcomers, or bride of Christ, stands out from the nominal Christian. Mary sat at Jesus' feet and learned of Him while Martha served and was dissatisfied. We could go on and on with examples of Christians seeking God's will in their lives versus those seeking their own will.

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So the thought of ranks among believers in heaven becomes very precious as we study and understand all that is involved. "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead..." (I Cor. 15:41-42a).

We believe these Scriptures show that there will be ranks in heaven, and we earnestly desire to be in that "first rank," not because we are desiring a higher attainment or greater rewards as such, but because those in the first rank are those who make up the bride of Christ and share that close place of communion with Him through eternity. This "prize" is waiting for all Christians. Let us "...so run, that ye may obtain!"

1. How would God be a "respecter of persons?"
2. According to what shall we be rewarded? Rev. 22:12.
3. What comprises this work?
4. What do you think the 30-, 60-, 100-fold Christians did to be classed this way?
5. What is going to manifest the work of each believer?
6. When will this take place?
7. Describe the building materials of I Cor. 3.
8. What is the meaning of the word "order" in I Cor. 15:23?
9. What will determine this order?
10. What was Paul hoping to attain in Phil. 3:11?
11. How much effort did he put into this work to attain?
12. What are the two groups of Rev. 4 and 5, and whom do they represent?
13. What is their position?
14. What is their activity?
15. After Rev. 4 and 5, where is the next group of Christians seen in heaven?
16. How does this group differ from those of Rev. 4 and 5?
17. What is the cost of winning the Prize? Phil. 3:8.

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18. Who is the Prize?
19. What is represented by the attire of the bride of Rev. 19:7-8?
20. Explain Eph. 5:25-33 in light of our study.
21. Will the whole Church be presented to Christ without spot or wrinkle? Why?
22. What is the warning of II Cor. 11:2-3?
23. Is it possible that Christians may be beguiled by Satan?
24. What is the result?
25. Explain “joint-heirs” of Rom. 8:17.
26. How did they get to be joint-heirs?
27. What is the result?
28. How many are going to win the Prize of I Cor. 9:24-25?
29. What is the rule for winning the Prize? I Cor. 9:27.
30. By what means may we win as spoken of in II Tim. 4:7-8?