

SOTERIOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

PART 59

REWARDS & INHERITANCE, PART 11

The crown of glory.

Peter identified this crown, the crown of glory, as a crown that faithful elders of the church will receive for their work as shepherds of the flock.

1 Peter 5:1–4 ¹Therefore, I exhort the elders [πρεσβύτερος] among you, as your fellow elder [συνπρεσβύτερος] and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, ²shepherd [ποιμαίνω] the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; ³nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. ⁴And when the Chief Shepherd [ἀρχιποίμην] appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Paul did not mention eternal rewards in connection with the position of elder, but he did talk about temporal remuneration and honor for those who labor in the body as elders.

1 Timothy 5:17 ¹⁷The elders [πρεσβύτερος] who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

An elder, πρεσβύτερος, is a person of responsibility and authority in matters of socio-religious concerns both in Jewish and Christian societies. For all of you men who are elders, the original meaning of the word in ancient Greek simply referred to being an old man. It was possibly used to refer to someone who comes before or has precedence. When it was applied to things, it indicated not age but importance. The meaning developed to combine the idea of greater age with greater respect. The word developed further to mean to be more important than, to make or regard as important, or to honor. Other forms of the word came to mean seniority or high standing or rank. "Hence this word group comes to be used also for institutional functions in society, since the wisdom of age is regarded as their prerequisite." The words were used for ambassadors and politicians [*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, s.v. "πρεσβύτερος"].

In the Septuagint, πρεσβύτερος was often used to translate Hebrew words that meant "old" but it was also used to refer to men who held official positions.

Genesis 18:11 ¹¹Now Abraham and Sarah were old [יָדַי, πρεσβύτερος], advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing.

Old, יָדַי, in this context simply refers to old people, specifically in this context Abraham and Sarah, and the Septuagint translated the Hebrew by using πρεσβύτερος.

Genesis 50:7 ⁷So Joseph went up to bury his father, and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders [יָדַי, πρεσβύ□□□□□] of his household and all the elders [יָדַי, πρεσβύτερος] of the land of Egypt,

In this verse, these are the same words in both the Hebrew text and the Greek Septuagint but the context in this verse is not referring to people advanced in age as it did in the first verse but here elder refers to a leader in the Egyptian community that makes religious, social, and leadership decisions.

In the New Testament, the word is used in the same way. It can refer to elderly people and it can refer to leaders, specifically leaders in the church.

1 Timothy 5:1–2 ¹Do not sharply rebuke an older man [πρεσβύτερος], but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers, ²the older women [πρεσβύτερος] as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity.

Titus 1:5 ⁵For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders [πρεσβύτερος] in every city as I directed you,

Elders are the primary element in the leadership of the church. Faithfully fulfilling the expectations of the Lord for shepherding the flock will be rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ.

Peter commanded his fellow elders to shepherd their flocks. Shepherd, ποιμαίνω, obviously refers to a person who cares for sheep and goats. The word as used by the Lord and here by Peter implies leading and providing for those led. What command did the Lord give Peter when He restored Him? He said tend to and shepherd My sheep.

John 21:15–17 ¹⁵So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My lambs.” ¹⁶He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Shepherd My sheep.” ¹⁷He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time,

“Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Tend My sheep.

The Bible is loaded with the imagery of shepherding. It is of primary importance for elders to understand the concepts inherent in shepherding a local body. According to Paul, preaching and teaching are preeminently important in fulfilling the role of elder. Elders, like all Christians, can fulfill their roles well or they can poorly perform.

“In the church, I have seen good elders and poor elders. Some elders continually push the doctrine of elder-rule onto the congregation, lording it over the flock, whereas others demonstrate loving patience and concern. Some elders, who served as staff pastors are more concerned about their careers and making money than about the needs of God’s people, whereas others demand nothing and accepted little for their labor because of their love for the Lord and their flocks. Many elders will receive this crown, but some will not” [Joe L. Wall, *Going for the Gold*, p. 204].

Elders are to be administrators as they carry out the responsibilities of leadership. Leadership does not mean doing it all; it involves delegation and supervision. They have spiritual obligations leaders in other secular endeavors do not have.

They are to keep the flock safe and secure from those who would harm them primarily by introducing false teaching that would take the people away from the truth thereby separating them from the Chief Shepherd. Paul counseled both Timothy and Titus that the truth was vitally important. The Word of Truth, sound doctrine, is the vaccine that is the primary defense against the diseases of carnality, unfaithfulness, and apostasy.

John 10:10–11 ¹⁰“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. ¹¹“I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

2 Timothy 4:1–4 ¹I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: ²preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. ³For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, ⁴and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

Titus 1:7–9 ⁷For the overseer must be above reproach as God’s steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, ⁸but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, ⁹holding fast

the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

Acts 20:28–31 ²⁸“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹“I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹“Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

“The pastor’s or undershepherd’s reward is for those who have been faithful to their divine appointment to feed and lead the flock of God. The faithful undershepherd is one who does not perform the responsibilities by constraint, but willingly, sacrificially, and eagerly. He directs the flock, but he does not stand as a dictator over the flock. In all areas of life he leads by a godly example and with a humble spirit. To such a faithful undershepherd the Lord will grant glory, praise, and honor at the judgment seat of Christ. Although he is often misunderstood, evil spoken of, and unappreciated, the undershepherd can be assured that God has reserved a special reward for those who are faithful to their divine calling” [Samuel L. Hoyt, *The Judgment Seat of Christ: A Biblical and Theological Study*, p. 175].

Rewards summary. Rewards are strictly the result of experiential sanctification salvation. Justification salvation and eternal life are not rewards; they are positional truth that is applicable to every person who believes. The judgment seat of Christ is not a tribunal where justification salvation is determined; if you are at the Βῆμα you are justified and therefore eternally secure. The judgment seat of Christ is a totally distinct judgment from the Great White Throne Judgment which is strictly and only for unbelievers. Any suggestion that the judgment seat is all at one time for all people, saved and unsaved, is in error. Rewards flow from living life as a faithful, fruit bearing disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. As such, they are totally discretionary according to the judgment of the Righteous Judge but we can be sure He will be totally just and exceedingly generous in His assessment of the work performed by those who belong to Him. We know rewards consist of commendation from the King, assignment to positions of responsibility in service to the King, wreath crowns for service in different areas of life performed on behalf of the King, and probably other rewards unspecified in the Scriptures. These rewards have eternal significance. Unfaithful, carnal living in this life will result in the forfeiture of rewards in the Kingdom and beyond but eternal life is never placed in jeopardy. The Lord’s judgment is not punitive in nature; condemnation is not the purpose. Any shame felt will be the result of self-condemnation as each believer, with spiritual clarity they never possessed in their pre-glorification salvation bodies, will know

they failed at times to take advantage of the opportunities they were provided to serve the Lord. Ultimately, every believer will enter into the joy of their Master, experience life in the family of God, and enjoy eternal life in the very presence of their Creator God.

Inheritance. Unlike rewards, inheritance encompasses both positional justification truth and experiential sanctification salvation truth.

Inheritance as positional truth is identified in several Scriptures. It is positional because it is applicable to all those who are born again believers.

Ephesians 1:13–14 ¹³In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴who is given as a pledge of our inheritance [κληρονομία], with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

All who have believed are sealed with the Holy Spirit who is the pledge, or promise, of our, all believer's, inheritance and all belong to God. This entire grace process is designed to bring glory to God. This inheritance is positional truth and it is applicable to all believers irrespective of their faithfulness or lack thereof. Peter expressed the same positional truth. He linked justification salvation with glorification salvation and an inheritance reserved for believers.

1 Peter 1:3–5 ³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to obtain an inheritance [κληρονομία] which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Inheritance, κληρονομία, is an inheritance, a transfer of land or possessions from a (deceased) parent to a child or to a descendant. It can refer to the thing inherited as a valuable possession which has been received. The word is from κληρος meaning a lot, portion, or share. In ancient Greek, it originally referred to casting a lot to determine the will of the gods when deciding something such as apportioning land. The meaning evolved into meaning an inherited estate or inheritance [*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, s.v. “κληρος”]. In Matthew 27:35, “casting lots” translates the words βάλλοντες κληρον so the meaning that referred to lots was not abandoned either.

Inheritance as a result of experiential sanctification is also presented as biblical truth. This adds a qualitative aspect to the concept of inheritance.

Colossians 3:23–24 ²³Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, ²⁴knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance [κληρονομία]. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

This inheritance reward is for diligently serving the Lord rather than men. In this sense, inheritance carries the same sense of recompense as does reward.

Hebrews 6:11–12 ¹¹And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹²so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit [κληρονομέω] the promises.

The promise in these verses is to attain spiritual maturity in this life and by working hard for the Lord, they will attain to rewards in the Kingdom.

It is unknown what these inheritance rewards are. We know what some of the general rewards are (service, responsibility, crowns, etc.) but perhaps even in that case we don't know all of them. What we do know is when we faithfully serve the Lord in this age, we will be rewarded in the next and those rewards have eternal significance. We also know the nature of our positional inheritance; those things are the righteousness of Christ imputed to our account, no condemnation, eternal life, reconciliation with God and adoption into the family of God, and more.

Romans 8:14–17 ¹⁴For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. ¹⁵For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

Positional truth is ours by virtue of the fact we have been adopted into the family of God. Sharing in the sufferings of Christ results in additional inheritance blessings that are beyond the positional inheritance all believers receive.

"In many families children inherit their parents' estates; each child is an heir and the children together are co-heirs. Similarly, since Christians are God's children, they are His heirs and they are co-heirs with Christ. They are recipients of all spiritual blessings now, and in the future they will share with the Lord Jesus in all the riches of God's kingdom. Sharing with Jesus Christ, however, involves more than anticipating the glories of heaven. For Jesus Christ it involved suffering and abuse and crucifixion; therefore being co-heirs with Christ requires that believers share in His sufferings. In fact believers do

share in His sufferings...Then after the suffering they will share in His glory" [John A. Witmer, "Romans" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 471].

There is a doctrinal error concerning rewards and inheritance that has become somewhat accepted in among some proponents of Free Grace theology. It is not new but it has been popularized anew by Joseph Dillow in his book *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*. This doctrine understands the concept of the believer's judgment to include punishment for unfaithful conduct during one's experiential sanctification salvation phase of the Christian life. While Dillow affirms that all who believe are eternally saved, his doctrine of Kingdom punishment for believers can confuse people into thinking he is teaching faith plus works. You have to really know the Bible and sound doctrine in order to spot the errors in his teaching. It takes several different forms. I'm not going deeply into this doctrine but by making you aware of this erroneous thinking, it should help you understand the proper way to view the judgment seat of Christ.

Before I start, I want to say that Dr. Dillow is a great Christian pastor and theologian. His early ministry was spent risking his life going into Communist countries to teach pastors sound doctrine. His pastoral teaching ministry continues to this day and it is still going into countries where it is dangerous to be found out to be a Christian. His book is an outstanding call to faithful discipleship. However, the conclusions he has reached concerning the judgment seat of Christ, rewards, and inheritance are, for reasons we will briefly examine, troubling.

One branch of this error teaches that unfaithful believers are cast into a place, a real place, of outer darkness and that will last for the duration of the Millennial Kingdom and, according to some of these theologians, even longer. Here are some examples of this doctrine.

"At the judgment seat of Christ, unfaithful Christians will lose entrance into the millennial kingdom and will be banished for 1,000 years" [Robert Govett, *Entrance into the Kingdom*, pp. 182, 282, 301].

"All levels of apostate believers and teachers will be slain by the Lord Jesus Christ at the Judgment Seat of Christ, and then cast into Gehenna for a thousand years. Gehenna is a region of destruction and ruin, which will contain fire, the graves of the slain bodies of apostates, and the blackness of darkness where the bodiless souls will be confined. At the end of the thousand years its inhabitants will be raised and changed, along with those who had been confined alive in the region of 'the outer darkness.' Together they will be given glorified bodies forever. Eternal life is based on the righteousness of Jesus Christ to every one who believes on Him. Therefore, since all apostates will have saved

spirits, they will also have eternal life. However, because of their rebellion against God's Word, they will be forfeiting their rights to the millennial kingdom for a thousand years" [Gary T. Whipple, *Shock & Surprise Beyond the Rapture*, p. 47].

A closely related but a bit less extreme view teaches that unfaithful believers will be subject to severe punishment that includes being cast into a real place of outer darkness that is still within the Kingdom or very close to it during the Millennium. While they won't be able to participate in the joy of the Kingdom, they will be in close proximity to it.

One teacher likens his doctrine to the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory. "According to the original rendering of John 10:28, 'they shall never perish,' should be translated, 'in no wise shall they perish forever'—in other words, if believers should sin and fail to repent, they will suffer temporarily what the unbelievers will suffer eternally. Purgatory as promoted by the Roman Catholic Church commences, in its view, at the time of death; and indulgence is promised by the Church through the Mass and other means. To this thought we vigorously object. Nevertheless, we cannot use heresy, either, to oppose the fact that Christians may receive punishment. We can only rely on the Scriptures to prove that the Matthew passage before us [Matt. 5:21-22] has reference to the judgment seat of Christ" [Watchman Nee, *The King and the Kingdom of Heaven*, p. 54].

In this case, this man has built his doctrine on a faulty interpretation of Matthew 5:21-22 and he has adopted the Roman Catholic concept of purgatory and applied it to believers. While he claims to object to the Roman Catholic theology of purgatory, he goes on to say they aren't wrong concerning Christian eschatological judgment.