An Exegetical Evaluation:

Believers' Differential, Works-Based Heavenly Rewards in the New Testament

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I. Introduction

Christ *alone* earned the salvation of his people through his reconciliatory death and resurrection on the cross—no Bible-believing, Protestant Christian would deny this central doctrine of their faith. However, various Scriptures (particularly within the New Testament) appear to teach that, *on top* of this salvation solely bought by Christ, believers can earn "rewards" in heaven for fruitful, Kingdom-minded work conducted during their earthly lives. In other words, these texts seem to advocate for 'salvation by grace, but rewards by works.' This principle does not prick the American, meritocratic conscience but rather *conforms* with it, leaving this interpretation to pervade today's Western Christianity largely unquestioned both in popular and academic theology.[1] Therefore, this manuscript seeks to thoroughly exegete the major passages often cited in favor of earned heavenly rewards within their historical-cultural and literary contexts to determine whether they legitimately support believers receiving proportional, works-based rewards at the eschaton. These texts include Paul's building metaphor in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, Luke's parable of the minas in 19:11-27 of his gospel, and the various 'crown' verses throughout the New Testament. This first chapter will discuss several introductory matters, including the significance and relevance of this research question, the

[1] Regarding popular commentary, note the following examples: "What Kind of Rewards Will Believers Receive in Heaven?" David Jeremiah Blog, last modified April 10, 2023, https://davidjeremiah.blog/what-kind-of-rewards-will-believers-receive-in-heaven/; "What Is the Purpose of There Being Rewards in Heaven?" GotQuestions.org, last modified January 4, 2022, https://www.gotquestions.org/rewards-in-heaven.html; Erwin W. Lutzer, *Your Eternal Reward: Triumph and Tears at the Judgement Seat of Christ* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2015); Lucas Kitchen, *Eternal Rewards: It Will Pay to Obey* (United States: Free Grace International, 2021); Wittmier, Deborah. *Crowns: Five Eternal Rewards That Will Change the Way You Live Your Life*. Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2010. Regarding scholarly literature, note the following examples: Robert N. Wilkin, *The Road to Reward: A Biblical Theology of Eternal Rewards*, Second ed. (Corinth, Texas: Grace Evangelical Society, 2014); Wayne Grudem's comments regarding more rewarded saints being "nearest to the throne of God" in "Chapter 56: The Final Judgment and Eternal Punishment," in *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Second ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 1409, Adobe Digital Editions; Berkof's comments regarding works-based "degrees in the bliss of heaven" in "Part Six: The Doctrine of the Last Things," in *Systematic Theology*, 1949 (Reprint, Louisville, KY: GLH Publishing, 2022), 472 of 482, Hoopla Digital Ebooks.

research and exegetical methodology, the evolution of rewards theology throughout Church history, and the overall organization of this paper.

The Problem and Purpose of This Study

The following section will lay out the issue in fuller detail, explain its theological and practical relevance, and briefly state the argument made in this study.

The Problem and Its Importance

As mentioned above, the American cultural value of meritocracy renders this rewards theology almost as a default position that rarely receives any critical investigation. To be sure, a few theologians and scholars have directly dealt with and contested this conventional understanding,[2] but these scholars have either approached the topic from a more theologically focused perspective (e.g., Schreiner and especially Taylor) or analyzed a myriad of relevant texts rather superficially (e.g., Blomberg). Scholarly literature has yet to produce any resource that places this doctrine on trial through an exhaustive analysis of the textual evidence. Subsequently, this paper intends to accomplish just that: challenge this widespread rewards theology by comprehensively exegeting these oft-cited passages according to their historical, cultural, and literary contexts.

The universal agreement on Christianity's core doctrines allows for fellow Christians to charitably disagree with each other on a variety of peripheral issues, such as the nature of free will, spiritual gifts, eschatology, etc., most of which minimally affect how the Christian walks

[2] E.g., Craig L. Blomberg, "Degrees of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35, no. 2 (June 1992): 159–72, https://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/35/35-2/JETS_35-2_159-172_Blomberg.pdf; T. Jeff. Taylor, *More Than Heaven: A Biblical Theological Argument for a Federal View of Glorification* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2022), Hoopla Digital Ebooks; Thomas R. Schreiner, "Justification Apart from and By Works: At the Final Judgement Works Will Confirm Justification," in *Four Views on the Role of Works at the Final Judgement*, eds. Alan P. Stanley and Stanley N. Gundry, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 71-98, ProQuest Ebook Central.

with God, evangelizes, and ultimately lives his life. However, this controversial topic of earned heavenly rewards does not conform to this general truth; a believer's subscription to works-rewards theology will inevitably impact his motivations for Kingdom building, serving others, and faithful obedience. Scripture regularly reiterates that the Christian should live a godly life because of his love for God and his love for others (e.g., Matt. 5:16; John 13:34-35, 14:21; 1 Pet. 4:10-11; 1 John 4:20), but if the believer is *also* promised rewards (whatever they may include) for their good works, then this will inherently complicate the *why* behind every Christian's personal ministry. To the extreme, this theology has the dangerous potential to turn the believer's motivations inward for personal gain; rather than preaching the gospel to the glory of God so others may be saved, the evangelist now does so in pursuit of *his own* glory and *his own* heavenly prizes. To the other extreme, this theology can ironically deceive more nominal 'Christians' into believing they are truly among the redeemed; if works are merely for additional rewards (and they are *not* reflective of their love for others and God), then why live in such a disciplined, purposeful way when the assurance of heaven will be there regardless? If this belief can, indeed, be supported by the biblical text, then the conversation within the Church on this topic must become much more prominent in seeking to safeguard believers against misguided motivations and attitudes toward Kingdom building. If it cannot be biblically supported, then preachers, teachers, and leaders within the Church have a responsibility to lead their congregations against this wide-spread idea so as to avoid the potential dangers of this theology. Either way, this issue has radical implications not only for the Christian's approach to Kingdom work but also for elders' shepherdship of their respective churches, ultimately begging the question of whether this doctrine actually can be upheld by the biblical text. Therefore, the impact of this exegetical investigation is not isolated to the realm of high-minded academic

theology or biblical study—it governs the believer's core impulses towards faithful Christian living.

Purpose and Position

Consequently, this thesis will argue that these oft-cited NT passages do *not* substantiate earned heavenly rewards when thoroughly exegeted within their respective historical, cultural, and literary contexts. This manuscript will holistically offer a much more balanced, nuanced, and conservative perspective on believers' eschatological wages by presenting alternative, but contextually founded, interpretations of these passages that do not conform to their conventional works-rewards readings. The exegetical arguments given in favor of these alternative conclusions will thereby indirectly and simultaneously refute the typical understanding of these texts to ultimately advocate against the popular theology of 'salvation by grace but rewards by works.'

As heavily alluded to thus far, this thesis takes the position *against* proportional, differential heavenly rewards for believers based on the exegesis of the topic's primary texts. More specifically, the "reward" (μισθός) or "crown" (στέφανος) spoken of in these passages generally refers to the salvific "inheritance" (Eph. 1:11-14; Col. 3:23-24; Heb. 9:15) given to *all* of Christ's people. While the complicated relationship between works and salvation will not be discussed here in-depth (see Limitations and Delimitations), this manuscript takes the perspective that salvation is wholeheartedly gained through faith[3] in Christ's sacrifice alone, but the Christian's faith is outwardly validated through obedience, perseverance, etc. (e.g., Matt. 24:9-13, Mark 13:13, Phil. 2:12, Jas. 2:14-26, Heb. 3:14) . The believer does not *earn* his

[3] Throughout this manuscript, "faith" will refer to the believer's complete devotion to God through his acceptance and trust in the gospel of Christ.

salvation through works, but the *genuineness* of his faith is either confirmed or invalidated by how he lives; the Christian truly saved by Christ will persevere through trial, remain faithful and obedient, progress in sanctification, etc., while the nominal "Christian" will have nothing to show for their "faith." To be sure, each believer will have to give an account to Christ for their lives and receive whatever praise or humiliation is due (1 Cor. 4:5; 1 John 2:28), but this does not necessitate 'degrees' or 'levels' of eternal rewards. Further, the federal headship of Christ (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 1:22-23, 5:22-23; Col. 1:17-18) leaves no room for individual differences within the eschatological Church; with Christ as all Christians' spiritual head, his perfect and complete glorification will extend to all believers on the Last Day (Rom. 8:17; 2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:4; Phil. 3:20-21), rendering this idea of differentiated heavenly rewards rather moot.[4] This position also emerges from the logical difficulties associated with rewards theology, such as the "perfection" of heaven (Rev. 21:3-5, 22:3-5) when some believers will have more 'rewards' than others, why God would institute a system of incentives when believers are not meant to be heavily incentivized by it (cf. Matt. 5:16; John 14:15; 1 Cor. 10:31; Eph. 2:10), and the exact nature of these rewards and what specific works constitute them. This thesis, however, will exclusively focus on the biblical text itself, arguing that these passages speak of the chasm between salvation and condemnation—not the minutely differentiated hierarchy of rewards among believers in the eschaton.

Research Methodology

The following section will detail the literature collection, analytical methodologies, limitations, and delimitations within this study.

[4] See Taylor's *More Than Heaven: A Biblical Theological Argument for a Federal View of Glorification* for more on the relationship between Christ's headship and believers' collective glorification at the eschaton.

Research Collection and Organization

Considering that this thesis will argue for a particular theological perspective through exegesis, the scholarly literature utilized comes primarily from academic commentaries on the relevant texts written within the last fifty years, along with a number of systematic theologies, journal articles on specific issues within these passages, and commentaries from older historical sources (e.g., from the early Church Fathers, the Reformers, etc.). These sources are found within a variety of public online libraries and databases (e.g., Google Books, Hoopla, Google Scholar) along with digital libraries, databases, and scholarly journals accessed through Liberty University (e.g., EBSCO, ProQuest, JSTOR, etc.). In gathering research, priority is given to a set of particularly well-reputed series of commentaries.[5] These sources are specifically utilized for their information regarding the passages' historical, cultural, and literary backgrounds, along with any syntactical-grammatical analysis given. As the preliminary literature was reviewed from June to September of 2023, the relevant data was organized into a digital literature matrix that then later became crucial to the synthesis of the research and the exegesis itself. To be sure, supplementary research was conducted in the process of writing the exegetical chapters during September to November 2023, but the bulk of the data collection and organization occurred using online libraries/databases and a substantial literature matrix during the summer of 2023.

Research Synthesis and Exegetical Methodology

Each cell of the literature matrix contained a certain source's data on a specific contextual element or verse (e.g., the historical details of 1 Corinthians according to Ciampa's *First Letter*

[5] This includes the Word Biblical Commentary (WBC), the New International Greek Testament Commentary (NIGTC), Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, the New International Commentary on the New Testament (NICNT), among others.

to the Corinthians[6] or details on verse 19:14 in Luke's parable of the minas from Bovon's *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51-19:27*[7]). When reviewing the literature, priority was given to pieces of data particularly relevant to the topic of earned heavenly rewards in order to narrow the scope of the exegesis. All the information was then synthesized within the exegetical writing process utilizing this extensive literature matrix.

This manuscript follows the standard exegetical method implemented by the vast majority of modern biblical scholars, laid out explicitly by Duvall and Hays[8] and Vyhmeister and Robertson.[9] That is, proper exegesis begins with placing the text in its original contexts: determining why the author decided to write the passage, understanding how the first audience would have read the text, and recognizing the various historical, cultural, and social elements surrounding the passage. Additionally, the excerpt must be placed within the book's larger literary structure, first discerning the author's overall flow of thought and then moving inward toward the relevant text with increasing precision. After setting this contextual framework, the passage in question can then be exegeted, phrase by phrase, according to these historical, cultural, and literary parameters, taking particular note of any significant syntactical-grammatical details or intriguing word use.

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[6] Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, ed. D. A. Carson, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), ProQuest Ebook Central.

[7] François Bovon, "The Parable of the Minas (19:11-27)," in *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51-19:27*, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. Donald S. Deer, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 603-620, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvb9370g.1.

[8] J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, "Chapter 2: The Interpretive Journey," in *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, third ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 39-49.

[9] Nancy Jean Vyhmeister and Terry Dwain Robertson, "Chapter 2: Biblical Exegesis and Interpretation," in *Your Guide to Writing Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology*, third ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 11-21.

Presuppositions, Caveats, Limitations, and Delimitations

Prior to discussing these texts, several stipulations, content restrictions, and theological and historical presuppositions must be disclosed. Firstly, it must be explicitly asserted that *this thesis does not advocate for works-based salvation*. Only through faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God who bore the full judgement of humanity's sin on the cross, can anyone be saved (Rom. 3:23-25, 5:9; Eph. 2:8-9; Phil. 3:9). However, actions do reveal one's spiritual condition; Christ-glorifying works *validate*—not earn—the believer's genuine faith in Christ (Jas. 2:14-26). The complex interplay between faith and works in salvation will not be discussed beyond this statement, but this affirmation of solely faith-based salvation cannot be overstated.

Additionally, this thesis will only be covering the major NT texts often cited in support of works-rewards theology (i.e., 1 Cor. 3:10-15, Luke 19:11-27, and the "crown" passages). That is, this manuscript will not examine any OT texts[10] or the NT texts *less* commonly referenced in favor of differential rewards.[11] Finally, in discussing the historical contexts of these passages, this manuscript will presuppose traditional views of authorship. The past few centuries of biblical scholarship have seen an increasingly heated debated on origins of the NT books, particularly since the popularity boom of the historical-critical method in the nineteenth century,[12] but it will generally be assumed that the historical Apostle Paul wrote the Pauline letters, the gospels were

[10] For more information regarding ancient Judaism's theology of rewards, see Paul S. Minear, "Rewards in Judaism," in *And Great Shall Be Your Reward: The Origins of Christian Views of Salvation*, 1941 (Reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005), 1-17.

[11] Other NT passages and themes that will not be discussed in this manuscript include: the Matthean theme of those "greatest" and "least" in the Kingdom (Matt. 5:19, 11:11 [cf. Luke 7:28], 18:4), the common phrasing of judgement "according to deeds/works" (Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:8; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 2:23, 22:12), and John's encouragement for his audience to ensure they receive a "full reward" (2 John 8).

[12] William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, "Chapter 2: The History of Interpretation," in *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, third ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 99-101.

penned by the historical Evangelists, etc. Subsequently, these controversies surrounding authorship will not be surveyed further.

A Brief History of Rewards Theology

This following chapters of this manuscript will exegete passages commonly cited in favor of believers' earned heavenly rewards and consequently have an exclusive focus on biblical exegesis. However, because theology stems from scriptural interpretation, it would be beneficial to briefly present the origin and evolution of this rewards theology over the course of Church history. Therefore, this section will give a condensed history of theological development regarding earned heavenly rewards from the early Church, the Reformation, and the modern era.

Rewards Theology within the Early Church

A theology of differentiated eternal rewards did not emerge within the Church immediately; rather, this notion of individual, proportional rewards appears to develop later around the fourth and fifth centuries, driven especially by theologians such as Jerome (c. 347-420 AD), John Chrysostom (c. 347-407 AD), and Augustine (c. 354-430 AD). This notion became precedented during the horrific persecution of Christians in the first few generations of Christianity, wherein the Church began heroizing martyrdom and heralding it as the mark of a "true disciple" who died as Christ did, inherently imbuing such a death with not only earthly honor, but superior divine glory.[13] Cyprian of Carthage (c. 200-258 AD) went so far as to say that the measure of a martyr's reward would correlate to his level of earthly anguish for the sake of

[13] Attilio Rossi, "Differences of Reward in Heaven: The Development of the Doctrine from the Fathers to the Definition at the Council of Florence," *Lumen: A Journal of Catholic Studies* 8, no. 1–2 (July 2020): 75, https://www.academia.edu/50085902/Differences_of_Reward_in_Heaven_The_Development_of_the_Doctrine_from_the_Fathers_to_the_Definition_at_the_Council_of_Florence; Ignatius, *Letters to the Romans*, ed. and trans. Bart. D. Ehrman, Loeb Classical Library 24 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 274-279, doi:10.4159/DLCL.ignatius-letters_romans.2003; *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, ed. and trans. Bart. D. Ehrman, Loeb Classical Library 24 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 390-391, doi:10.4159/DLCL.martyrdom_polycarp.2003.

Christ.[14] Paul's discussion on singleness in 1 Corinthians 7 placed virgins in the same category; because remaining unmarried preserved sexual purity and allowed for more fruitful ministerial efforts, early Christians generally believed virgins would gain a similarly unique standing upon Christ's return.[15] However, this two-tiered hierarchy of martyrs and virgins versus relatively unexceptional believers then generalized into a diversity of rewards for each Christian depending on their earthly life.[16] For example, Clement (c. 150-215 AD) believed that the Christian's 'rank' of glory in heaven would be based upon how the believer "moderated his passions" and exercised "perfect knowledge,"[17] John Chrysostom (c. 347-407 AD) speculated that universal and equal reward would encourage laziness and apathy within Christians' personal ministries,[18] the pseudepigraphal *Apocalypse of Paul* (c. 250-400 AD) depicted the righteous in heaven

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[14] Brian E. Daley, "4: *Senectus Mundi*: Eschatology in the West, 200-250," in *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 42, Google Books; Cyprian, *Epistle 37: To Moses, Maximum, and Other Confessors*, trans. Rose Bernard Donna, The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1964), 96, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt284z4s; see also Cyprian, *Epistle 76: Cyprian to Nemesianus and Other Bishops and Martyrs in the Mines*, trans. Rose Bernard Donna, The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1964), 317-318, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt284z4s.

[15] Rossi, "Differences of Reward in Heaven," 76; for an example of the early Church heralding virgins as 'higher' in the coming Kingdom, see Methodius (c. 300 AD), "The Banquet of the Ten Virgins: Chapter III: Virgins Being Martyrs First Among the Companions of Christ," in *Volume 6: Fathers of the Third Century: Gregory Thaumaturgus, Dionysius the Great, Julius Africanus, Anatolius and Minor Writers, Methodius, Arnobius*, American ed,, eds., Arthur Cleveland Coxe, James Donaldson, Alexander Roberts, Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325 (New York, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886), 6:332, https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/coxe-ante-nicene-fathers-volume-6.

[16] Rossi, "Differences of Reward in Heaven," 77.

[17] Rossi, "Differences of Reward in Heaven," 77-78; Clement, "The Stromata, or Miscellanies: Book VI: Chapter 13: Degrees of Glory in Heaven Corresponding with the Dignities of the Church Below," in *Volume 2: Fathers of the Second Century: Hermes, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire)*, American ed., eds., Arthur Cleveland Coxe, James Donaldson, Alexander Roberts, Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325 (New York, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 2:504-505, https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/coxe-ante-nicene-fathers-volume-2-fathers-of-the-second-century.

[18] Rossi, "Differences of Reward in Heaven," 78-79; John Chrysostom, "Homily 41," in The Homilies of S. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church, (Oxford, UK: John Henry Parker, 1839), 4:586-588, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/njp.32101065690776.

sectioned off by walls according to their levels of glory and honor,[19] Jerome (c. 347-420 AD) penned two treatises arguing *against* the simple eschatological dichotomy between believers and unbelievers,[20] and Augustine speculated that the righteous would experience Christ's glory at varying levels of potency.[21] Theologically, then, this conception of individualized heavenly rewards evolved from the early Church's natural exaltation of martyrs and virgins a few hundred years after Christ.

Rewards Theology among the Reformers

Between the early Church (<500 AD) and the Reformers (1500-1700) stood the Middle Ages (500-1500 AD), wherein several theological developments, specifically regarding the afterlife and the eternal state,[22] arose within Christianity. The Middle Ages' focus on the nature of heaven, hell, punishment, reward, punishment, and purgatory—undoubtedly precedented, at least in part, by the Church Fathers' discussion of merited heavenly rewards (see above)—led to a generally agreed upon vision of 'degrees' within eternal reward *and* eternal punishment.[23]

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[19] Rossi, "Differences of Reward in Heaven," 79; *Apocalypse of Paul*, trans. Montague Rhodes James, The Apocryphal New Testament Being the Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Apocalypses (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1924), 537-540, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiuo.ark:/13960/t4fp2sg2b.

[20] Rossi, "Differences of Reward in Heaven," 79-80; Jerome wrote these treatises specifically against Jovinian, a contemporary of Jerome's who argued for equality in ministerial value between virginity and marriage (i.e., that no heavenly gradations would exist between the married and the virgin); for more information regarding the Jerome-Jovinian discourse, see David G. Hunter's *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy in Ancient Christianity: The Jovinianist Controversy*, eds. Gillian Clark and Andrew Louth, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[21] Rossi, "Differences of Reward in Heaven," 81; Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. William M. Green, Loeb Classical Library 417 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 374-377, doi:10.4159/DLCL.augustine-city_god_pagans.1957; Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, trans. John W. Rettig, The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 90:58-61, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[22] Emma Disley, "Degrees of Glory: Protestant Doctrine and the Concept of Rewards Hereafter," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 42, no. 1 (April 1991): 96, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23965144.

[23] A clear example of the medieval preoccupation with 'levels' of heaven and hell, see Dante Alighieri's (1265-1321) *The Divine Comedy* (Salt Lake City, UT: Project Gutenberg, 2021), https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/997/pg997-images.html; Disley, "Degrees of Glory," 80.

However, due to the Protestant emphasis on grace and its overarching rejection of meritocracy,[24] this vision of heavenly gradations and levels of condemnation came under intense scrutiny, ultimately leaving the Reformers severely disagreeing in how works did/did not influence one's eternal experience.

Two primary lines of conflicting logic contributed to this theological split among the Reformers: (1) Protestantism rejected the idea of purgatory and the role of works in justification,[25] but this invoked the question of whether Christians would truly be motivated to live godly lives when their eternal fate depended solely on grace and faith,[26] (2) the idea of 'degrees' in hell seemed obvious (i.e., it would be incoherent and unfair if *all* unbelievers received the same, universal punishment)[27] and is scripturally supported (e.g., Matt. 10:15, 11:22-24, 12:36-37; Heb. 10:29), but in their pursuit of theological consistency, applying this same line of thought to the other side of eternity would be theologically *inconsistent* with Protestantism's disavowal of meritocracy.[28] Subsequently, several overlapping Protestant camps emerged on this topic: (1) some outrightly rejected the idea of earned heavenly rewards and argued that the alleged passages supporting this theology either spoke on the realities of earthly life (not heavenly life) or differentiated between the righteous and unrighteous (not between the

[24] Disley, "Degrees of Glory," 77, 79.

[25] Disley, "Degrees of Glory," 77.

[26] Disley, "Degrees of Glory," 77-78.

[27] E.g., see John Veron, *The Overthrow of the Justification of Workes and the Vain Doctrin of the Merits of Men with the True Affection of the Justification of Faith and of the Good Workes That Procead or Come of the Same, and in What Respect Our Good Workes Are Crouned or Rewarded of God Sette Forth Dialoge Wise by John Veron* (London, UK: Ihon Tysdale, 1561; Ann Arbor, MI: Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership, 2011), http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A14367.0001.001.

[28] Disley, "Degrees of Glory," 81, 85-86.

righteous),[29] (2) some maintained the idea of merited rewards while clearly distinguishing between salvation by grace but rewards by works,[30] (3) some advocated for differentiated, but unmerited, heavenly rewards (e.g., they demonstrate God's goodness in giving free gifts to his

[29] Disley, "Degrees of Glory," 86-88, 96-97; examples of those within his theological camp among the Reformers include Veron, *Overthrow of the Justification of Workes*; John Cameron, "Ad Matth. Cap. XVIII. Vers.2. vsque ad 6," in *Praelectionum in Selectiora Quaedam Novi Testamenti Loca, Salmurii Habitarum* (Saumur, France: Cl. Girard & Dan. Lerpinière, 1628), 2:325-326, Google Books; Heinrich Bullinger, "La Troisieme Deca de des Sermons de M. Henry Bulinger: Sermon IX: de la Liberte Chrestienne, et dv," in *Les Cinq Decades des Sermons Dem* (Tiguri, Switzerland: De l'imprimerie de Thomas Courteau, 1565), 308-310, Google Books; William Tyndale, *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon* (London, UK: Willyam Copeland, 1549), Early English Books Online, https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/books/parable-wicked-mammon-compiled-yere-our-lorde-m-d/docview/2240914602/se-2?accountid=12085.

[30] Disley, "Degrees of Glory," 101; examples of those within his theological camp among the Reformers include Hugh Latimer, "Sermons Preached in Lincolnshire, 1552: The Second Sermon of Master Latimer's," in *Sermons by Hugh Latimer, Sometime Bishop of Worcester, Martyr,* 1555, ed. George Elwes Corrie (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University, 1844), 509, Digital Library of Classic Protestant Texts, https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cdocument%7C4993393?account_id=12085&usage_group_id=101906.496-511; Philip Melanchthon, "Part 7: Reply to the Arguments of Adversaries," in *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, trans. F. Bente and W. H. T. Dau, 1531 (Salt Lake City, UT: Project Gutenberg, 2020), 65 of 340, Apple Books; William Covell, "Article 6. Of Faith and Works," and "Article 7.The Vertue of Works," in *A Ivst and Temperate Defence of the Five Books of Ecclesiastic Policie: Written by M. Richard Hooker* (London, UK: P. Short for Clement Knight, 1603), 43, 47, Early English Books Online, https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/books/iust-temperate-defence-fiue-books-ecclesiastical/docview/2240866620/se-2?accountid=12085; John Davenant, "Chapter LVII: Arguments Derived from a Consideration of the Rewarder," and "Chapter XLX: The Arguments of the Romanists in Favour of Merit of Condignity," in *Disputatio de Justitia Habituali et Actuali*, 1631, trans. Josiah Allport (London, UK: Hamilton, Adams, and Co., 1846), 2:106, 2:146-147, Internet Archive Books, https://archive.org/details/atreatiseonjust02davegoog/page/n6/mode/2up.

children,[31] they are a natural consequence of more mature holiness.[32] While some Reformers blatantly dismissed this theology of rewards, most attempted to incorporate it into their

[31] Disley, "Degrees of Glory," 90-92, 94; examples of those within his theological camp among the Reformers include William Tyndale, "An Exposition upon the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Chapters of Matthew: The Fifth Chapter of Matthew," in *Expositions and Notes on Sundry Portions of the Holy Scriptures, Together with the Practice of Prelates*, ed. Henry Walter, 1536 (Cambridge, UK: The University Press, 1849), 30-31, Internet Archive Books, https://ia904700.us.archive.org/31/items/works02tynd/works02tynd.pdf; John Hilsey, "Manual of Prayers, or the Primer in English: The Third Part of the Primer, Treating of Works," in *Three Primers Put Forth in the Reign of Henry VIII*, ed. Edward Burton, 1539 (Oxford, UK: The University Press, 1834), 430-431, Internet Archive Books, https://archive.org/details/threeprimersputf00unknuoft/page/436/mode/2up?q=manual; Heinrich Bullinger, "Sermo IX: De Libertate Christiana & Scandalo: de Bonis Operibus & Mercede Siue Premio Bonorum Operum," in *Sermonvm Decades Qvinqve, de Potissimis Christianae Religionis Capitibvs*, eds. Radulphi Newberij and Hugonis Iakfoni, 1562 (London, UK: Henricus Midletonus, 1587), 204-205, Early English Books Online, https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/books/sermonum-decades-quinque-de-potissimis/docview/2240953732/se-2?accountid=12085; Thomas Cartwright, "The Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ According to Matthew: Chap. V: Annotations," in *A Confutation of the Rhemists Translation, Glosses and Annotations on the New Testament, so Farre as they Containe Manifest Impieties, Heresies, Idolatries, Superstitions, Prophanesse, Treasons, Slanders, Absurdities, Falsehoods and Other Evills. by Occasion Whereof the True Sence, Scope, and Doctrine of the Scriptures, and Humane Authors, by them Abused, is Now Given. Written Long since by Order from the Chiefe Instruments of the Late Queene and State, and at the Speciall Request and Encouragement of Many Godly-Learned Preachers of England, as the Ensuing Epistles Shew* (Leiden, South Holland: William Brewster, 1618), 81, Digital Library of Classic Protestant Texts, https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cdocument%7C4983474; William Fulke, "Chapter IX: Against Merits, Meritorious Works, and the Reward for the Same," in *A Defence of the Sincere and True Translations of the Holy Scriptures into the English Tongue, Against the Cavils of Gregory Martin*, ed. Charles Henry Hawthorne, 1583 (Cambridge, UK: The University Press, 1843), 369-370, Gale Primary Sources, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CHUQXH252939290/NCCO?u=vic_liberty&sid=summon&xid=7b14f48e&pg=3; George Downame, "Cap. XIII. An Appendice to This Third Controversie, Concerning the Parity of Justice," in *A Treatise of Iustification Wherein Is First Set Dovvne the True Doctrine in the Causes Effects Fruit Consequents of It, According to the Word of God. And Then All Obiections and Cavils of the Adversaries to God's Free Iustification by Grace, Are Answered and Confuted, Especially of Robert Bellarmine, Jesuit and Cardinal. Wherein Also the Popish Doctrine of Merit Is Refuted and Disproved, with Many Other Weighty Points of Christian Religion, Occasionally Handled and Discussed, and Difficult Places of Holy Scriptures Expounded and Vindicated* (London, UK: E. Purslow, 1639), Early English Books Online, https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/books/treatise-iustification-wherein-is-first-set/docview/2264185314/se-2?accountid=12085; William Perkins, "A Golden Chaine, or the Description of Theologie: Containing the Order of the Causes of Saluation and Damnation, According to God's Word. A View Whereof Is to Be Seene in the Table Annexed. Hereunto Is Adjoyned the Order Which M. Theodore Beza Vsed in Comforting Afflicted Consciences: Chap. XXXI: Of the Covenant of Grace," in *The Whole Works of That Famovs and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Vniversitie of Cambridge, M. William Perkins, in Three Volumes. The First Volume. Newly Correct According to His Owne Copies: with Distinct Chapters, and Contents of Every Booke Prefixed: and Two Tables of the Whole Adjoyned: One of the Matter and Questions, the Other of Choice Places of Scripture*, 1592 (London, UK: John Legat, 1631), 70, Early English Books Online, https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/books/whole-works-that-famous-worthy-minister-christ/docview/2240948844/se-2?accountid=12085.

[32] Disley, "Degrees of Glory," 79, 99-100; Martin Luther, "Discussion: First Part: Section LXX," in *De Servo Arbitrio "On the Enslaved Will" or the Bondage of the Will*, ed. Henry Atherton, trans. Henry Cole and Edward Thomas Vaughn, 1525 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1931), Christian Classics Ethereal Library, https://www.ccel.org/ccel/luther/bondage.toc.html; Francis White, "The Eight Point. Workes of Svpererrogation Specifically with Reference to the Treasvre of the Chvrch," in *A Replie to Iesuit Fishers*

systematic by arguing that either good works engendered sanctification and would naturally result in a better heavenly experience, or that varied rewards were merely because of God's free grace and not of merit.[33]

Rewards Theology within Modern Christianity

In the wake of the Reformation and the expansion of Protestantism through the West, this theology of earned rewards apart from salvation (i.e., the second category discussed above) has now become nearly universally accepted among today's theologians and interpreters. Nonetheless, the vast majority of scholars who subscribe to this idea recognize its theological issues, such as how differentiated rewards would fit with the perfection and completeness of heaven and the scripturally vague nature of what these rewards will consist. For example, in Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, he argues that while believers will receive differing rewards based on their life's works, the 'lesser' believer's heavenly experience will not be diminished because his happiness will come from dwelling in God's pure presence and not from the rewards.[34] However, if earned heavenly rewards will have no impact on the glorified believer's heavenly joy, then the question must be asked: what would be God's purpose in instituting such an incentive? Erickson and Berkhof offer a creative, albeit reaching, solution to this issue, namely that the differences among believers' rewards will lie in their works-proportional *capacities* for joy; the extremely faithful and fruitful Christian will have a bigger 'cup' and able

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Answere to Questions Propounded by His Most Gratious Matie: King James (London, UK: Adam Islip, 1624), 517, Early English Books Online, https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/books/replie-iesuit-fishers-answere-certain-questions/docview/2248516948/se-2?accountid=12085; Davenant, "Chap. LV. Proved by Arguments Derived from the Condition of the Doer," 2:84-85.

[33] Disley, "Degrees of Glory," 86, 105.

[34] Grudem, "The Final Judgement and Eternal Punishment," 1409-1410; note that Grudem cites 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 and Luke 19:11-27 to support this claim—two major passages that will be exegeted later in this manuscript.

to more intensely experience heaven while the less faithful Christian's cup will be smaller, yet every glorified believer's cup will be completely full and no one will be able to perceive these differences.[35] Reymond alternatively argues that the sinlessness and purity of glorified believers will negate all possibility of jealousy, envy, or regret; rather, "the Christian with greater rewards will love the one with less rewards perfectly and will not exalt himself over him. The Christian with less rewards will love the one who has greater rewards also perfectly and will rejoice with him in his blessed state."[36] Presenting yet another perspective, Wilkin understands perseverance as the criterion for additional rewards that, according to Luke's parable of the minas, will correspond to the believer's authoritative position within the Messianic Kingdom.[37] This is only a representative sample, but regardless of the disparate speculations on how it fits within a systematic theological framework, modern Protestant Christianity generally advocates for merited heavenly rewards apart from the free gift of salvation.

However, general adherence to this perspective does not equate to universal acceptance across the scholarly board; some contemporary theologians do advocate *against* this works-rewards theology, albeit doing so from an obviously minority position. Blomberg takes a strong opposition to this widespread idea, briefly exegeting nearly all the passages typically referenced in support of differentiated heavenly rewards and implores Christians to recognize its practical

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[35] Millard J. Erickson, "Part 12: The Last Things: 60. Final States," in *Christian Theology*, Second ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 1241-1242; Louis Berkhof, "Part Six: The Doctrine of the Last Things," in *Systematic Theology*, 1949 (reprint, Louisville, KY: GLH Publishing, 2022), 472 of 485, Hoopla Digital Ebooks.

[36] Robert L. Reymond, "Part Five: Last Things: Chapter Twenty-Five: Biblical Eschatology," in *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, Second ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 997 of 1285, Hoopla Digital Ebooks.

[37] Robert N. Wilkin, "Chapter One: Christians Will Be Judged According to Their Works at the Rewards Judgement, But Not at the Final Judgement," in *Four Views on the Role of Works at the Final Judgment*, eds. Alan P. Stanley and Stanley N. Gundry, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 27-32, ProQuest Ebook Central.

dangers: "I am convinced that when this unfounded doctrine of degrees of reward in heaven is acted upon consistently … it can have highly damaging consequences for the motivation and psychology of living the Christian life."[38] Schreiner contends that, on the role of works at the eschatological judgement, the believer's works will simply and solely *validate* his justification; faithful actions reflect the authenticity of one's faith.[39] From a far more theological perspective, Taylor rebuts this doctrine of differing rewards through the concept of Christ's headship over his people: through Christ's atonement—*his* work—believers are transferred from being under Adamic (i.e., spiritually rebellious) headship to that of Christ, rendering salvation and perfect glorification as the global 'reward' won for all subsumed under Christ (i.e., federal headship leaves no room for individualism in this regard).[40] As demonstrated, those who do not support the conventional works-rewards theology have made their arguments with relatively superficial exegesis and/or an emphasis on the theological and practical domains. Therefore, this manuscript will begin filling in those gaps with an extensive exegesis of the passages most often referenced on this topic.

Chapter Divisions

Each of the following chapters will follow a similar internal structure based on the exegetical methodology described above (i.e., first defining the text's historical, cultural, and literary contexts, then exegeting the text in light of these contexts). Each chapter will be dedicated to a particular NT passage or series of verses commonly used to support the doctrine of merited heavenly rewards for believers, with the next chapter focusing in on 1 Corinthians 3:10-

[38] Blomberg, "Degrees of Reward?" 163-171.

[39] Schreiner, "Justification Apart from and By Works," in *Four Views*, 91.

[40] Taylor, *More Than Heaven*.

15, the third chapter on Luke's parable of the minas (19:11-27), the fourth chapter on the myriad of "crown" verses (1 Cor. 9:24-26a; 1 Thess. 2:19; 2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Pet. 5:4; Jas. 1:12), and the concluding chapter offering a brief summary of the manuscript and directions for future research on this topic.

In 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, Paul exhorts his audience (Christians at large and teachers in particular) to "build" an enduring structure upon the foundation of Christ, warning them that God's fiery eschatological judgement will *purify* the 'buildings' erected with sturdy stone and metal yet totally consume those built with shaky and shoddy kindling. The controversy enters as Paul notes that the builders of lasting 'buildings' will "receive a reward" while the lesser-quality builders "will suffer loss; but … be saved … through fire" (vv. 14-15). The typical interpretation of this passage states that these verses speak solely of saved believers, and Paul is describing a proportional reward system for believers: the more faithful and fruitful, the greater the heavenly reward. However, through various grammatical, syntactical, and semantic analyses on the basis of various contextual elements, the exegesis of this passage will demonstrate that Paul was not envisioning a hierarchy of works-rewards within the Church, but was rather depicting the Church as a building founded upon Christ that will be *refined* on the last day by purging His people of those whose faith is revealed—through their works—as inauthentic. In other words, Paul is not drawing a contrast between better and worse Christians who will be proportionally rewarded in the next life; rather, Paul is depicting the future eschatological separation between the saved and the unsaved.

Jesus' parable of the minas recorded in Luke's gospel (19:11-27) contains dual storylines of faithful stewardship and a new king rejected by his constituents. The king's two faithful servants receive rewards of authority in the new kingdom proportional to the profit they earned

with their original mina, leading many to interpret the parable as depicting believers' future heavenly positions as correspondent to their fruitfulness in waiting for Jesus' return as King. However, the historical and literary contexts of this parable point to its primary lessons concerning *not* future heavenly authority for believers to earn but Christ as a rejected King, the coming of His Kingdom, and the true nature of citizenship in His Kingdom.

The fourth chapter will engage a series of verses throughout the NT speaking of believers' heavenly "crowns," which are often taken as a reference to added rewards that Christians can earn through perseverance, discipleship, obedience, etc. As with the previous passages, several contextual and textual features point to each of these "crown" verses simply referring to different images of salvation, eternal victory, and glorification.

The final chapter will summarize the primary points each chapter, point to other NT verses that can be used to support works-rewards theology, and discuss how the knowledge gaps within this topic can continue to be filled.

II. Works Tested by Fire: 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

This comprehensive exegetical analysis will begin with arguably the most explicit passage regarding believers' works and rewards. Commentators and theologians often understand Paul's words as defining a hierarchical system of loss and reward during the judgement of believers; if one's works prove edifying to the Kingdom, then that individual "will receive a reward,"[41] but if one's works prove fruitless then that Christian will presumably lose this potential of greater eschatological reward.[42] However, despite this passage's frequent citation in favor of the conventional understanding of works-based rewards, several historical, literary, and grammatical elements challenge this interpretation. Paul's building metaphor does, indeed, exhort church leaders (and Christians at large) to build faithfully upon the foundation of Christ, but the grammatical, syntactical, and semantic nuances of these six verses, the temple-related allusions to the OT, and the eschatological framework point to Paul's contrast *not* between believers, but between those made righteous by Christ and those under divine judgement. This passage's exegesis will begin with an analysis of the historical-cultural and literary contexts, followed by a verse-by-verse examination and interpretation.

Historical-Cultural Context

Prior to exegeting any biblical passage, the historical-cultural and literary contexts must be established in order to discern the author's original message to his original audience. These

[41] All major English translations provide this wording, including the New American Standard Bible (NASB), the English Standard Version (ESV), the Christian Standard Bible (CSB), the Lexham English Bible (LEB), the New English Bible (NET), the New International Version (NIV), the New King James Version (NKJV), the New Living Translation (NLT), and the Revised Standard Version (RSV).

[42] E.g., Wilkin, "Chapter One: Christians Will Be Judged According to Their Works at the Rewards Judgement," 32; Ciampa and Rosner, "Commentary on 1 Corinthians: II. True and False Wisdom ad Corinthian Factionalism, 1:10-4:17: D. Reflections on the Nature of Christian Leadership, 3:5-4:17," 177-178; Grudem, "The Final Judgment and Eternal Punishment," 1410; Berkhof, "Last Things," 472 of 485.

particular verses sit within Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church, written from Ephesus (16:8)[43] and most likely written around 54 or 55 AD—approximately two decades after Christ.[44] Paul first traveled to Corinth during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-18), and the epistle's mélange of content indicates Paul's intention to address several problems within the Corinthian church that he had planted a few years prior.[45] While the concrete historical details surrounding this epistle's writing are unknown, the first chapter indicates that Paul heard of these issues from "Chloe's people" (1:11). Their exact identity of cannot be pinned down with certainty, but most scholars deduce "Chloe's people" (lit. "those of Chloe") as referring to either Chloe's household (servants, family members, etc.), business partners and/or employees, or a house church hosted by Chloe.[46] Considering that Chloe had knowledge on the internal issues at Corinth, she and her people likely either lived in Corinth and wrote to Paul about their concerns or they were in Ephesus near Paul (16:8) and had some tie to the Corinthian church.[47] Paul notes that he specifically heard of "quarrels" within the church concerning members aligning

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[43] Thomas R. Schreiner, "Introduction," in *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, eds. Eckhard J. Schnabel and Nicholas Perrin, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017) 7:9, ProQuest Ebook Central; Edward Earle Ellis, "Chapter 1: Address and Salutation (1:1-3)," in *1 Corinthians: A Commentary*, ed. Terry L. Wilder (London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2022), 16, EBA Purchased Books; Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, "Introduction," in *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, ed. D. A. Carson, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 54, ProQuest Ebook Central; David E. Garland, "Introduction to 1 Corinthians," in *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 36, ProQuest Ebook Central; Anthony C. Thiselton, "Introduction: III. The Occasion of the Epistle: Dates, Reports, Letters, and Integrity," in *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, eds. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 32.

[44] Schreiner, "Introduction," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:4.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Schreiner, "Commentary: 2. Addressing Problems in the Church (1:10-6:20): A. Exhortation to Church Unity (1:10-4:21)," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:61-62; Ellis, Chapter 3: True and False Wisdom (1:10-4:21)," 46; Ciampa and Rosner, "Commentary on 1 Corinthians: II. True and False Wisdom and Corinthian Factionalism, 1:10-4:17: A. Request for Unity, 1:10-17," 118; Thiselton, "The Occasion of the Epistle," 32.

[47] Ibid.

themselves with certain individual teachers, leading to factions developing within the congregation (1:10-13). The first main section of the letter addresses this issue (1:10-4:21),[48] and it is within this portion that the passage in question (3:10-15) appears. While this topic recurs in other letters to other churches (e.g., Eph. 4, Rom. 16:17-18), the culture of first-century Corinth makes Paul's exhortation to communal solidarity and doctrinal purity particularly pertinent to the exegesis of 3:10-15.

The prime location of Corinth facilitated the city's prosperity and reputation as a cultural melting pot full of idolatry, greed, and sexual immorality (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9-11).[49] The city sat in northern Greece between two close trading ports: Cenchreae (to the east, accessing the Aegean Sea) and Lenchaeum (to the north, accessing the Ionian Sea), and the piece of land between these two seas (the Isthmus of Corinth) served as a well-traveled route for merchants and travelers.[50] Corinth's resulting affluence brought in an amalgamation of people—Jew, Gentile, rich, poor, and everything in between.[51] The city prospered well before the first century, but the Romans' destruction of Corinth in 146 BC and the city's century-later re-founding by Julius Caesar led to the culture's evolution according to Roman influence and government at the turn of the millennium.[52] Therefore, the city's opulence and religious pluralism led to first-century Corinth's notoriety as one of the greatest cities in the Roman Empire, "emblematic of ostentatious wealth,

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[48] Ciampa and Rosner, "Introduction," 67-68; Gerald Bray and Thomas C. Oden, eds., "Introduction," in *1-2 Corinthians*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006) 12:41-42, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[49] Ciampa and Rosner, "Introduction," 54.

[50] Schreiner, "Introduction," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:1; Scott M. Manetsch and Timothy George, eds., "Introduction to 1 Corinthians," in *1 Corinthians*, Reformation Commentary on Scripture: New Testament (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017) 9:50, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[51] Schreiner, "Introduction," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:2; Manetsch and George, "Introduction," 9:50; Ciampa and Rosner, "Introduction," 54.

[52] Schreiner, "Introduction," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:2; Ciampa and Rosner, "Reflections," 175.

spiritual pride, and sexual license."[53] The Corinthian church stood as the largest Christian congregation in Greece at the time,[54] and the internal issues stemmed primarily from Corinthian culture infiltrating the church.[55]

Because of Corinth's metropolitan prosperity, the city naturally attracted a diverse population with equally diverse religious beliefs. Not only did Corinth contain temples and shrines to various Greek gods and goddesses (e.g., Apollo, Aphrodite, Artemis, etc.), but pagan Corinthians also belonged to Egyptian cults, practiced ritualistic magic, and worshipped political powers.[56] Further, individual Corinthians often did not subscribe to just one of these religions but rather accepted and practiced several; the entire culture embraced religious pluralism.[57] On the other hand, the Jews in Corinth obviously stood out for their monotheistic faith and specific laws regarding circumcision, Sabbath, food, etc., but this exacerbated the Christians' perceived oddity because they did not have any temple or distinctive rituals like their Corinthian neighbors.[58] By the mid-second century, Christians were largely seen as atheistic due to their lack of external practice, especially in comparison to the prevalent Jewish traditions and pagan rituals.[59] No record explicitly indicates a similar perception of Christians circulating at the time of this letter, but such a widespread, societal assumption very possibly began developing (or had already developed) by the mid-first century. The resulting social isolation accordingly made any kind of

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[53] Manetsch and George, "Introduction," 9:50; Ciampa and Rosner, "Introduction," 54.

[54] Bray and Oden, "Introduction," 12:42.

[55] Ciampa and Rosner, "Introduction," 55.

[56] Schreiner, "Introduction," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:2-3; Garland, "Introduction," in *1 Corinthians*, 28-29.

[57] Schreiner, "Introduction," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:2-3.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Schreiner, "Introduction," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:2-3.

compromise alluring, especially under the same Roman government that executed their Messiah and was actively persecuting fellow Christians.[60] This proved especially problematic considering these false religions often involved explicitly anti-Christian acts such as sexual rituals and barbaric sacrifices.[61] In short, the cultural pressures to externalize one's beliefs with ritualistic practice and the Roman government's widespread attack on Christianity loomed over the Corinthian Christians, tempting them to compromise their faith and give in to the widespread pluralism.[62]

Subsequently, the Corinthian Christians, presumably mostly Gentile,[63] encountered several communal problems, but the most relevant concerns for this manuscript include the escalating divisions discussed in the first four chapters of the epistle where 3:10-15 appears. Earlier in the letter, Paul briefly notes that he heard of "quarrels" and developing factions within the church from "Chloe's people" (1:11-12; see above),[64] prompting the apostle's written address,[65] but the impetus behind *why* the Corinthians began dividing and associating themselves with certain leaders remains unsettled. Nonetheless, the ancient mass fascination with competitive rhetoric and displays of sophistry may oddly shed some light on this lingering question. Well-educated and well-spoken orators circulated throughout the Greco-Roman world

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[60] Schreiner, "Introduction," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:2-3.

[61] Bray and Oden, "Introduction," 12:43.

[62] Paul alludes to this issue throughout chapters 8-10 in the context of food sacrificed to idols (see specifically 8:1-13 and 10:14-33).

[63] Paul lists several stereotypically Gentile sins elsewhere throughout the letter, such as idolatry and sexual immorality (e.g., 5:1-13, 6:9-20, 8:7-13); Schreiner, "Introduction," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:6.

[64] All quotations of Scripture in this manuscript come from the New American Standard Bible (NASB) translation.

[65] Schreiner, "Introduction," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:8.

demonstrating their rhetorical abilities and gaining a kind of fanbase.[66] Several first- and second-century sources detail the celebrity around these "sophists" (from the Greek word for wisdom, σοφία), particularly in Corinth around 80-90 AD (a few decades after Paul penned this letter),[67] such as Philo and Chrysostom who describe them as "winning the admiration of city after city and drawing well nigh the whole world to honor them," and "wretched sophists … shouting and reviling one another," respectively.[68] While this public routine of evaluating rhetorical skills was not officially recorded in Corinth until the late first century, it is entirely possible that this form of entertainment began to develop around the time of Paul's letter. If Corinth was already home to regular displays of sophistry, then it likely facilitated the internal divisions within the Corinthian church: members would associate themselves with certain leaders based on their speaking abilities since such classification of orators was habitual within the culture.[69] The element of poor, immoral, and/or hypocritical leadership also likely contributed to these divisions, as can be deduced from 1:11-12 and chapter five's rebuke of a member's (possibly a leader's) inappropriate relationship with his stepmother.[70] Additionally, because Jews and pagans predominantly comprised Corinth's population, the Christians were particularly susceptible, as

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[66] Schreiner, "Introduction," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:15.

[67] This letter was likely written around 54 or 55 AD (see Historical Context); Schreiner, "Introduction," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:4.

[68] Philo, *On Husbandry*, trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, Loeb Classical Library 247 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930), 143, doi:10.4159/DLCL.philo_judaeus-husbandry.1930; Dio Chrysostom, *The Eighth Discourse, On Virtue*, trans. J. W. Cohoon, Loeb Classical Library 257 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932), 379-383, doi:10.4159/DLCL.dio_chrysostom-discourses_8_virtue.1932; Ben Witherington III, "2 Corinthians: The Background and Foreground of the Letter: The Opponents," in *Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 349, Google Books.

[69] Schreiner, "Introduction," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:15; Bray and Oden, "Introduction," 12:42; Witherington, "Opponents," 349.

[70] Bray and Oden, "Introduction," 12:42.

minorities, to the social influence of the city's wicked culture.[71] The culmination of all these historical variables (religious pluralism, possible sophistic influences, questionable leadership, social isolation) depict the Corinthian church as in dire need of communal unity and doctrinal truth founded upon Christ—both of which Paul directly addresses in chapter three.

Literary Context

Paul wrote the NT epistles originally as private letters to Christian communities that found themselves struggling to navigate correct versus false teaching, church logistics and discipline, the merging of Jews and Gentiles, holy living as Christ's people, etc. Consequently, behind each of Paul's letters stood a set of social circumstances specific to that congregation that Paul, the founder of their church, sought to address. Properly exegeting any of Paul's epistles, therefore, requires an interpretation guided by whatever social context that initially prompted the apostle's writing. This first letter to the Corinthians is no different, but its status as the longest and most heterogenous Pauline epistle in the NT[72] makes discerning the letter's precise occasion difficult: Paul discusses a wide amalgamation of issues evidently facing the Corinthian church, and the letter reads as more of a medley of conversations rather than a one-track consultation. In contrast, Paul's correspondence with the Thessalonians, for example, primarily focuses on exhorting them to persevere under trials with the future hope of Christ's second coming,[73] yet 1 Corinthians addresses internal divisions (1:10-4:21), appropriate discipline of open sin within the church (5:1-13), proper Christian ethics regarding legal and sexual matters (6:1-7:40), food

[71] Schreiner, "Introduction," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:3.

[72] Bray and Oden, "Introduction," 12:42-43.

[73] Walter A. Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough, "21: Thessalonians, Timothy, and Titus: A Legacy of Faithfulness," in *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey*, Third Ed., Encountering Biblical Studies (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 315.

sacrifices (8:1-11:1), corporate worship issues (11:2-34), spiritual gifts (12:1-14:40), and the reality of Christ's resurrection (15:1-58).[74] It somewhat appears as if the apostle is jumping from one topic to another with little explanation as the letter progresses. However, a few verses of this letter (5:9-13; 7:1; 16:17)[75] clarify its widely assorted nature: Paul had *previously* written and advised the Corinthians about some of their internal issues—this epistle is at least the second letter in the larger Corinthian exchange.[76] Therefore, the variegated topics within the epistle are not a haphazard mixture of homilies that Paul threw together; rather, this letter comprises a singular, extant *episode* of an ongoing correspondence between Paul and the Corinthians.[77] Whether there were even more letters that preceded 1 Corinthians is simply unknown and lost to history, but Paul wrote this epistle to advise the Corinthian church on the several matters that were endangering their community and their faith. Reconstructing this literary context admittedly requires speculation and deductive reasoning, as the details of Paul's relationship with the Corinthians can only be surmised by their two letters in the NT, but generally speaking, Paul wrote this first epistle as part of an already-existent letter exchange that addressed the wide range of internal conflicts that were threatening the Corinthian congregation's unity and faith in Christ.

Narrowing the contextual scope, Paul opens the first four chapters of his letter (1:10-4:21) discussing the divisions emerging within the Corinthian church. The first two chapters indicate that the Corinthians have begun self-segregating according to preferred teacher (1:10-17), including those "belonging" to Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or Christ (1:11-12), and Paul answers

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[74] Garland, "Introduction," in *1 Corinthians,* 38-39.

[75] In 5:9-13, Paul speaks of how he already wrote to them about associating with the sexually immoral; 7:1 demonstrates that the Corinthians had already written to Paul at least once; and 16:17 implies that some of Paul's coworkers already responded to the Corinthian problems by physically going to Corinth.

[76] Ciampa and Rosner, "Introduction," 54-55.

[77] Garland, "Introduction," in *1 Corinthians,* 36.

by crediting God with all true (i.e., Christ-centered) wisdom, rendering such confidence in human leaders futile (1:18-31): "Let one who boasts, boast in the LORD" (1:31). Subsequently, the Corinthians should be unified under the common cause and wisdom of Christ as given by the Spirit, not identify themselves with their preferred teacher (1:18-2:16). This truth becomes even sharper in the next two chapters as Paul reminds the Corinthians that their teachers and leaders are to serve as God's ministerial instruments for their local church and will eventually be held accountable for how they steward such a heavy and eternally significant assignment (3:5-4:21).[78] Thus, throughout this first main section of the epistle where 3:10-15 occurs, Paul (1) spurs on the Corinthian Christians to not align themselves with specific leaders such as himself or Apollos but rather with Christ alone as a unified congregation, and (2) warns the church's leaders to be cognizant of the fact that their wisdom comes solely from God and they will be accountable to God for how they lead his people.[79] These primary points of unity and accountability, therefore, comprise the central thrust of Paul's argument in this section.

Circling in closer to the passage in question, Paul draws an agricultural metaphor in the verses immediately prior (5-9), arguing for the relatively negligible credit that human laborers should receive in their coworking with God to cultivate a faithful people for himself. The apostle rebuts this Corinthian notion of leader-specific factions by rebuking competition and boasting amongst "the one who plants and the one who waters" since God alone can give the growth (v. 7-8). Indeed, "each will receive his own reward according to his own labor" (this wording to be discussed below under the exegesis of verse fourteen), but all those who build the Kingdom collectively equal nothing (vv. 7-8) without the sovereignty of God who graciously gives the

[78] While Paul gives this exhortation specifically to the Corinthians, such truth would obviously also go beyond the first-century Corinthian church and apply to the universal Church.

[79] Ciampa and Rosner, "Reflections," 166; Ellis, "True and False Wisdom," 46-47.

service opportunities (v. 5), spiritual gifts of his workers (vv. 5-6), and overall development of his people's sanctification (v. 6).[80] As Ciampa explains,

> Paul's point has been that although he and Apollos performed different tasks with respect to the Corinthians (planting and watering respectively), they shared the same status as 'servants' of the Lord: in v. 5 they are both servants; in v. 6 neither is ultimately responsible for the growth; and in v. 7 neither is anything (to speak of, in comparison with God). In v. 9 both are fellow workers. The clear emphasis is that Paul and Apollos have the same rank.[81]

This understanding of human coworkers simply serving as God's evangelistic instruments communicates here that it is not the opinion of the *Corinthians* that should be of import to the church leaders, as is implied in 1:26-29, but *God's*—after all, it is he who gave them such an assignment (3:10, 15:10; Eph. 2:10, 4:7-16).[82] Interestingly, Ciampa also sees verses 5-9 as likely alluding to Isaiah 5:1-7 wherein the prophet speaks of Yahweh tending his vineyard (Judah) that only gave "worthless" grapes, resulting in the Lord's declaration that the vineyard be "consumed" and he will "lay it bare," foretelling of Israel's coming exile.[83] In other words, as God (through Isaiah) begins to reveal the fate of Israel in the wake of their spiritual infidelity, Yahweh warns that the fruitless nation of Israel, reflecting their cheap faith, will inevitably come under judgement. If Paul did intend to reference this Isaianic text, his agricultural metaphor here

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[80] Schreiner, "Unity," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:88-90.

[81] Ciampa and Rosner, "Reflections," 169.

[82] Ibid., 167; Thiselton, "Commentary: II. Causes and Cures of Splits within the Community; Loyalty-Groupings or Status-Groupings in Conflict with the Nature of the Cross, the Spirit, and the Ministry (1:10-4:21): D. The Application of These Issues to the Church, Ministers, and Ministry (3:5-4:21): 1. Three Explanatory Images: God's Field, God's Building, and God's Holy Shrine (3:5-17)," 304.

[83] Ciampa and Rosner, "Reflections," 166.

in verses 5-9 subtly condemns those who fail to faithfully prepare "God's field" (v. 9). This potential undercurrent fits well with the supporting architectural picture (vv. 10-15).[84]

This building metaphor in verses 10-15 then reiterates the primary point of verses 5-9: God alone should be praised for the growth of his Kingdom people, but church leaders (and Christians at large) will be accountable for the quality of their Kingdom work.

The following verses (16-17) further clarify this architectural metaphor immensely, specifically regarding the nature of this building in 10-15. These two verses identify the structure built in 10-15 as God's symbolic, NT temple (i.e., the Church, where the Spirit dwells in every believer) (2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:20-22), alongside God's promised destruction of any who threaten his temple. The vast majority of commentators, therefore, recognize verses 10-17 as Paul drawing upon OT temple imagery to depict the ultimate "temple" of Christ's people (the eschatological and temple-related language of this passage will be further discussed within the exegesis of these verses; cf. 6:19).[85] Just as Paul likely referenced an OT eschatological prophecy in the preceding agricultural metaphor (vv. 5-9), he also seems to incorporate Malachi 3-4 here in verses 10-17, where the postexilic prophet tells of Yahweh arriving to his temple as a fire consuming those not faithful to him.[86] The remaining verses (18-23) finish this section by Paul exhorting the Corinthians to become truly "wise" by adopting the "foolishness" of the world (i.e., the wisdom of God that is unity in Christ; vv. 18-19; cf. 2:6-16). Further, the Corinthians must reject factionalism precisely due to all Christians possessing "all things" via their belonging to Christ and Christ's belonging to God (v. 21); therefore, "no one is to be boasting in people"

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[84] See the exegesis of verses 10-15 below and particularly the word study of μισθός (v. 8, 14) under the exegesis of verses 14-15.

[85] Ciampa and Rosner, "Introduction," 79; Ciampa and Rosner, "Reflections," 177-178.

[86] Taylor, "Chapter 10: The Temple Builder," in *Federal View of Glorification*, 226 of 299.

since all genuine Kingdom co-builders co-labor only so *God* might give the growth (vv. 20-23). Paul endeavors to teach the Corinthians in this chapter that (1) true wisdom in Christ renounces any kind of division amongst believers since all will be held to account for their work (vv. 4, 8, 11-15, 18-21), (2) only God deserves praise for the flourishing of his Kingdom (vv. 5-7, 9-10, 22-23, and (3) any who threaten this progress will ultimately be consumed in divine judgement (vv. 15-17). Considering this contextual framework, a proper exegesis of verses 10-15—which many cite in advocating for a conventional understanding of works-based rewards—can be performed.

Exegesis

The following six verses comprise one of (if not *the*) primary NT passages utilized under this subject. However, placing this text within its historical, cultural, and literary situations (discussed above) now allows for a proper, contextually based interpretation of Paul's original message. These verses contain a supplementary building metaphor wherein Paul reminds the Corinthian church leaders (and Christians generally) that *how* they build the "temple" (i.e., God's people) upon the foundation of Christ will ultimately be held to account and warrant different outcomes for their labor.

The Foundation of Christ (Vv. 10-11)

> According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each person must be careful how he builds on it. For no one can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Paul turns from the agricultural metaphor in verses 5-9 to a clarifying architectural picture to further emphasize his argument regarding divisions amongst believers and the rising influence of Corinthian culture on the church. Remarkably, the apostle begins by highlighting the central role of *God* in his ministry success; Paul's laying of Christ as a "foundation" for this

ecclesial structure cannot be credited to himself but only "according to the grace of God," (cf. 15:10). God alone revealed the truth of Christ to Paul on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:1-19); Christ alone gave Paul his ministerial gifts for planting and discipling the Corinthian church (1:2; cf. Acts 18:1-18, Eph. 4:4-16);[87] and whatever Kingdom progress grows out of his efforts can only be attributed to him who gives the growth (3:5-7). In short, *only God should be praised for effective Kingdom work*. Therefore, Paul's successful laying of Christ as the Church's unshakeable cornerstone occurred purely and solely by God's sovereign intervention and *not* by Paul's own merit. The apostle emphasizes this truth at the outset to communicate, first and foremost, the futility of the Corinthians separating themselves by leader, for any and all spiritual development comes directly from God.

However, such a caveat does not negate the believers' role as God's obedient instruments for Kingdom expansion. Indeed, all growth comes from God, but the planter and waterer must both dutifully facilitate the environment for such growth to be given (3:5-9). Paul, in this metaphor, served as the "master builder" who 'wisely' (referring to the true wisdom of Christ in vv. 2:6-16) set the base layer of this proverbial building; Paul, as an apostle and missionary to Corinth, established the gospel of Christ as the most fundamental truth of the Corinthian church. Similarly, the Corinthians must also be wise in *their* constructions upon Paul's work, stewarding their spiritual gifts and opportunities well (cf. Eph. 2:10, 4:4-16) in like-"wise" fashion. Paul accordingly exhorts the Corinthians to extreme caution when adding upon this holy foundation; all subsequent work must be worthy of Christ, performed with the recognition of this building's eternal significance.[88] Consequently, a community established upon anything other than Christ

[87] Ciampa and Rosner, "Introduction," 54.

[88] Ciampa and Rosner, "Reflections," 173-174; Schreiner, "Unity," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:91.

will inevitably crumble since "any alteration in the foundation will throw it out of kilter and will eventually destroy it."[89] This warning not only calls for believers to unite under Christ (as opposed to dividing), but it also implicates the cultural influences infiltrating the Corinthian church. Various contextual elements (discussed above) placed these Corinthian Christians within a sociocultural environment that tempted them to compromise their faith by giving in to worldly influences, prompting this clarification that an enduring "building" of believers can stand upon the basis of Christ *alone*.[90] These first two verses contain dense truths for both the Corinthian church and the universal body of believers: (1) all Kingdom growth facilitated by believers ultimately originates in God's grace and sovereignty, rendering God as the sole party worthy of praise, (2) Paul's "wise" laying of Christ as the Corinthians' foundation requires for all subsequent building efforts to be similarly "wise" (i.e., centered upon Christ as the true wisdom of God), and (3) any community structure *not* forged upon Christ—and Christ alone—is guaranteed to collapse (vv. 13, 15).

Building Upon the Foundation (Vv. 12-13)

> Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, each one's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each one's work.

These next two verses give the first indication that this building metaphor contains clear allusions to Solomon's Temple, in order to demonstrate the significance of believers' Kingdom efforts by depicting the Church as an eschatological fulfillment to Solomon's Temple and setting up Paul's overarching contrast between the faithful and the disobedient.

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[89] Schreiner, "Unity," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:92; Ellis, "True and False Wisdom," 145; Thiselton, "God's Building," 308.

[90] Ellis, "True and False Wisdom," 145.

Beginning in verse twelve, the apostle moves from a specific charge to the Corinthian church's leaders (3:5-9) to a generalized exhortation for all Christians ("if [Εἰ] anyone [τις; an indefinite pronoun] builds").[91] The Church universal edifies and expands the Kingdom upon the sole foundation of Christ, yet Paul lists six metaphorical materials used to carry out this building commission—and the final product will ultimately be judged for its endurance (vv. 13-15). Throughout the early Church, when allegorical interpretation stood as the dominant hermeneutical approach,[92] many overanalyzed these six materials by allegorizing them individually, such as Pelagius who understood this as categorizing six types of responses to the gospel message.[93] However, such an interpretation misses Paul's point; he does not differentiate each substance from the others, but he rather creates a dichotomy between the high-quality, sturdy metal and stone, and the low-quality, flammable substances (wood, hay, straw).[94] This interpretation is further supported by Paul's use of OT temple imagery within verse twelve, and it is here that Paul begins foreshadowing his conclusion in verses 16-17: this metaphorical building, comprised of believers standing upon Christ, *is* the NT "temple."

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[91] Ciampa and Rosner, "Reflections," 174.

[92] Walter C. Kaiser, "Chapter 16: A Short History of Interpretation," in *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, eds. Walter C. Kaiser and Moisés Silva, Revised and Expanded ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 256.

[93] Bray and Oden, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians: The Principles of Divine Architecture," 12:96.

[94] Ellis, "True and False Wisdom," 146; Ciampa and Rosner, "Reflections," 174. Paul creates a very similar picture in his second epistle to Timothy (2:15-26): as Paul exhorts Timothy to teach his people about properly living out the faith and remaining steadfast in the gospel truth (vv. 15-18), the apostle declares that "the firm foundation of God stands" (v. 19) and that a "large house" can be comprised of both "gold and silver implements" and "implements of wood and earthenware" (v. 20). Paul delineates the precious metals as "for honor" and the low-quality materials as "for dishonor," (v. 20), so that becoming an "implement for honor" requires "cleansing himself from these things" (v. 21) (i.e., false teachings, arguing, sinful lifestyles, etc.; cf. vv. 22-26). The entire passage (vv. 14-26) draws a dichotomy between those who devote themselves to the "knowledge of the truth" and those "in opposition," caught in "the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will" (vv. 25-26).

In describing this Christ-founded structure that others will escalate (vv. 10-11), the apostle pulls from the construction vision of Solomon's Temple—a building meant to stand as the grand palace of Yahweh's presence (1 Kgs. 8:6-11; 2 Chr. 7:1-16). The OT describes the temple's magnificent formation in various places, such as in 1 Chronicles:[95]

> … for the *temple* is not for mankind, but for the LORD God. Now with all my [David's] ability I have provided for the *house of my God* the *gold*, … the *silver*, … the bronze, … the iron, … the *wood*, … onyx stones and inlaid stones, stones of antimony and stones of various colors, and all kinds of *precious stones* and alabaster in abundance (1 Chr. 29:1-2; emphasis added).[96]

From this above passage alone, Paul's use of temple imagery becomes abundantly clear; just as Solomon's grandiose house of worship would be embellished with precious metals and stones, the purified Church will similarly comprise a metaphorical building composed of the same imperishable materials. This understanding gains further traction as one recognizes the role of the Spirit in the temple: the Spirit of God's presence dwelled in the Holy of Holies (1 Kgs. 8:6; cf. Lev. 16:2), but by Christ's eternal sacrifice and his service as Christians' eternal high priest (Heb. 9:11-12, 10:19-20), the Spirit now *in*dwells every believer (Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Cor. 6:16). Thus, the "temple" stands where the Spirit dwells—within and among the Church.

Looking back to verses 5-9, Paul's reasoning for utilizing both farming and construction pictures to make his overall point in this section (vv. 5-17) becomes clearer under this "temple" paradigm. The tie between these two themes initially appears random to modern readers, but the theological relationship between these two images has a solid precedent in OT theology and

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[95] Ciampa and Rosner, "Reflections," 174; Thiselton, "God's Building," 311.

[96] Other verses similarly speak of the Temple's construction, such as 1 Kings 5:17 and 6:20-35.

would likely be familiar to Paul given his Jewish upbringing (Phil. 3:5-6).[97] In short, ancient Israel envisioned an eventual return to an Edenic land, and several construction elements of Solomon's Temple (e.g., the engravings of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers) reflect this expectation (e.g., 1 Kgs. 6:18, 23-36).[98] Just as Yahweh walked in the Garden of Eden with humanity (Gen. 2:8), the temple (and the pre-Solomonic tabernacle) allowed for God's presence to dwell among sinful humanity (Exod. 40:34-38; 2 Chr. 5:11-14), calling back and looking forward to a sinless, paradisical time between God and his people. Such a connection also appears in several psalms (e.g., 2:6-8; 24:1-3; 36:9-10) and in the prophets (e.g., Ezek. 47:1-12; Isa. 5:1-7).[99] Fundamentally, Paul seems to be utilizing these Jewishly interlinked pictures of agriculture and construction to develop his general argument of verses 5-17, supporting the interpretation of the "building" of verses 10-15 as a temple-like structure.

However, what constitutes faithfully building with "gold, silver, [and] precious stones" while avoiding using "wood, hay, and straw"? Paul does not clarify, but commentators throughout Church history have understood this picture as addressing correct doctrine and practice. For example, Origen interpreted the durable building with sturdy materials as symbolizing righteous thought and action, but sinning upon Christ's foundation resulted in an easily consumable structure.[100] Further, Chrysostom saw these varied building blocks as referring

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[97] Ciampa and Rosner, "Reflections," 172-173; Thiselton, "God's Building," 307; Lawrence E. Stager, "Jerusalem and the Garden of Eden," *Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies / ארץ-ישראל: מחקרים בידיעת הארץ ועתיקותיה* 26 (1999): 186-188, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23629939.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Ciampa and Rosner, "Reflections," 172-173; Thiselton, "God's Building," 307; Lawrence, "Jerusalem and the Garden of Eden," 186-188.

[100] Bray and Oden, "Divine Architecture," 12:96.

to one's *effort*, not results, in Kingdom work.[101] Various Reformers read this verse, in keeping with the literary context of internal divisions, as addressing false teaching, such as John Colet (1467-1519):

> … those who rely on their own ingenuity and think they can of themselves bring some new thing into the church are actually building a structure that is out of proportion to and unworthy of the foundation (that is, Christ), and is displeasing to God and dishonorable to the church. This is a building of wood, hay, and stubble; it is a building false, fragile, and perishable.[102]

Overall, while unspecific in the resources' exact meaning, Christians have traditionally interpreted this verse as communicating a stark distinction between those who embellish the Christ-foundation with indestructible stone and metal versus those who haphazardly assemble with cheap logs and tufts of hay. The prime building materials listed here evidently allude to the OT temple's construction, allowing Paul to depict the Christ-founded Church as the NT parallel to Solomon's Temple.

Turning to verse thirteen, the apostle explicitly lays out the eschatological nature of this warning, again with temple references. The verse in totality points to the end of time when all will stand before Christ, be held to account, and be rendered their just fate (2 Cor. 5:10). Several words and phrases, such as "the day" (ἡ ἡμέρα),[103] "is to be revealed" (ἀποκαλύπτεται),[104] and "with fire" (ἐν πυρὶ),[105] signifies the eternal weight of believers' building efforts.[106] Therefore, not

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[101] Bray and Oden, "Divine Architecture," 12:96-97.

[102] Manetsch and George, "Commentary on 1 Corinthians: 3:1-23 Divisions in the Church," 9:31.

[103] Cf. Matt. 7:22; Phil. 1:6; Heb. 10:25; 2 Pet. 3:12.

[104] A present passive verb; cf. Luke 17:30.

[105] This phrase frequently occurs in passages depicting the judgement of the condemned (e.g., Matt. 13:40; 2 Thess. 1:8; Rev. 18:8). The eschatological significance of πῦρ used within verses 13-15 will be later discussed under the exegesis of verse fifteen.

[106] Ellis, "True and False Wisdom," 146-147.

only does this entire passage depict the Church as the temple, but this is the *eschatological* temple.[107] Paul enhances this picture by again referring to the OT, specifically the post-exilic prophet Malachi who prophesies of Yahweh's future arrival to the "temple" in judgement:[108]

> And the Lord, whom you are seeking, will suddenly come to His temple … But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire, and like launderer's soap. And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness … Then I will come near to you for judgement …" Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened attentively … "I will have compassion for them (those that fear God) … so you will again distinguish between the righteous and the unrighteous, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him. For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze, … But for you who fear My name, … you will crush the wicked underfoot, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I am preparing (Mal. 3:1-4:3).

Malachi foretells of the final day when God will arrive to the "temple" and righteously dole out his just retribution against unbelievers while preserving the faithful through this judgement. Combined with Paul's words here in verse thirteen, the apostle utilizes this picture to indicate that this future evaluation of God's temple (i.e., the Church) will *refine* its structure so as to distinguish between the wicked and the true fearers of God. Despite this common observation amongst commentators, most still go on to conclude Paul's contrast as *between* believers and not between believers *and* unbelievers (further discussed within the exegesis of verses 14-15).[109]

The "work" this fire will test calls back to how someone builds upon the Christ-foundation (vv. 10-11), whether the individual raises up the temple with imperishable or

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[107] Ellis, "True and False Wisdom," 146.

[108] Ciampa and Rosner, "Reflections," 174; Schreiner, "Unity," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:92; Taylor, "Temple Builder," in *Federal View of Glorification*, 226 of 299.

[109] E.g., Ciampa and Rosner, "Reflections," 176; Schreiner, "Unity," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:92-93; Ellis, "True and False Wisdom," 150-151.

perishable materials (v. 12). The exact nature of such building work is vague, as mentioned above, yet readers have historically interpreted it as referring to correct teaching and faithful living—as demonstrating the true wisdom of God (1:17; 2:1-8).[110] Indeed, this passage speaks of one's *works* coming under judgement (and not the person directly),[111] but Paul does later clarify that this judgement will also assess the *why* behind one's works in 4:4-5; God will "bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of human hearts."[112] Paul and other biblical writers speak elsewhere of being judged "according to deeds/works" (e.g., Rom. 2:6, 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 20:12), and while the intricate relationship between faith and works is outside the scope of this manuscript, the NT collectively indicates that one's works directly reflect their faith (or lack thereof) (cf. Jas. 2:14-26). This concept pairs well with Paul's earlier statement that his own Kingdom efforts succeeded only "according to the grace of God," (v. 10)[113]; faithful works of stewardship can only be accredited to God, yet wicked deeds, pointing to a wicked spirit, will come under divine judgement (Matt. 7:21-23; John 5:29). Altogether, verse thirteen utilizes OT prophecy and eschatological language to describe the future fiery refinement of the Church (the "temple") as faithful works of gold, silver, and stone will indicate a faith of similar substance, but structures built with cheap resources, along with their builders, will undoubtedly be destroyed.

[110] Ciampa and Rosner, "Reflections," 175-176.

[111] Ibid., 172.

[112] Ibid., 176.

[113] Cf. Paul's other statements in 1 Corinthians regarding responsibility in working for the Kingdom purely out of devotion to God and for the good of the Body of Christ (e.g., 9:16-18, 23; 10:33; 12:14-26).

Rewards, Losses, and Fire (Vv. 14-15)

> If anyone's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet only so as through fire.

The center of the 'rewards' debate revolves around these next two verses. Beginning in verse fourteen, Paul straightforwardly gives the gratifying result of one's faithful building efforts surviving the fiery purification of the eschatological Church-temple. This statement initially appears rather uncomplicated, but scholars and theologians across Church history have widely disagreed on the exact nature of this "reward" (μισθὸν), especially considering verse fifteen's caveat that the poor builder "will be saved." In other words, if both the high-quality and low-quality worker "will be saved," then what, specifically, is this "reward" that the more faithful receives? Does it include added Kingdom responsibility? Greater heavenly joy? Something more tangible? Most commentators will humbly admit to speculating here,[114] but several textual elements point to a different conclusion on Paul's use of "reward" in verse fourteen.

Elucidating the nature of verse fourteen's "reward" must begin by analyzing the contrast in verse fifteen, specifically the syntax, grammar, and phraseology of verse fifteen. Many will understand the object of "he will suffer loss" (ζημιωθήσεται) as the "reward" from the previous verse; however, "work" (ἔργον; v. 15a) is much more likely to be the intended referent due to its closer proximity to ζημιωθήσεται.[115] Therefore, not necessarily do believers lose out on rewards yet retain salvation, as some conclude,[116] but their frail efforts reveal themselves as untenable; the

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[114] E.g., Ciampa and Rosner, "Reflections," 176; Schreiner, "Unity," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:93.

[115] Ellis, "True and False Wisdom," 150-151; Blomberg, "Degrees of Reward?" 165,

[116] E.g., Garland, "III. Factions and Dissension in the Church (1:10-4:21): Evaluating the Work of God's Servants (3:1-17)," in *1 Corinthians,* 111; Wilkin, "Christians Will Be Judged According to Their Works at the Rewards Judgement," 31-32.

one who builds cheaply and unfaithfully will have his works ultimately "burned up" and lost as the Church-temple undergoes its eschatological refinement. Now, those who recognize this syntactical detail typically interpret these verses as depicting the futility of some Christians' ministry and evangelism endeavors due to their poor quality and/or negligible results yet still retaining their 'saved' status. For example:

> Even though their ministries are significantly flawed, they themselves will not be destroyed on the day of the Lord … These ministers are saved since they genuinely put their faith in Jesus as the crucified and risen Lord, but the flaws in their ministries will be exposed.[117]

> The issue then is not reward or punishment, heaven or hell, but reward or no reward. It is the builder's "work" (3:13) that will be burned up, not *the builder* himself.[118]

> We must be clear on this. Salvation is a free gift that comes through faith in Jesus Christ … but rewards come as a result of work and perseverance.[119]

However, this conclusion is logically inconsistent considering Paul's earlier statement of his success coming directly from God's grace (v. 10; cf. 15:10), the OT temple allusions (e.g., Mal. 3-4) wherein the distinction is between the righteous and the wicked (and not between fellow believers), and Paul's later (and other biblical writers') specifications that one's works directly reflect their heart towards God (4:4-5; cf. Jas. 2:14-26). These factors imply that Paul's depiction of this judgement does not solely consist of an evaluation of believers' works and a doling out of proportional rewards, but rather a differentiation between those who exemplify genuine faith with Christ-glorifying works and those who demonstrate a halfhearted or false "faith" by working with makeshift materials.

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[117] Schreiner, "Unity," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:93.

[118] Ciampa and Rosner, "Reflections," 176.

[119] Wilkin, "Christians Will Be Judged According to Their Works at the Rewards Judgement," 32.

Granted, the major issue with this conclusion is Paul's ending caveat that such a person who builds poorly "will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet only so as through fire" (v. 15b),[120] evidently communicating that this individual would still be covered with Christ's righteousness and that Paul intends to create a hierarchy of believers based on their quality of building. However, an analysis of these key phrases both inside and outside of the NT, a study of certain grammatical cues within this latter half of the verse, and a recognition of πῦρ's ("fire") connotations of condemnation throughout the NT all indicate that this conventional understanding of verses 14-15 is flawed and that the latter half of verse fifteen depicts the eschatological judgement of those not committed to Christ.

Beginning with σωθήσεται ("he will be saved"), this verb (σῴζω) frequently occurs elsewhere in the NT *without* any spiritual/salvific implications, such as referring to healing or life preservation.[121] For example (emphases added):

> … for she was saying to herself, "If I only touch His cloak, I will get *well*." But Jesus, turning and seeing her, said, "Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you *well*." And at once the woman was made *well* (Matt. 9:21-22);[122]

> And if those days [of the "great tribulation" in v. 21] had not been cut short, no life would have been *saved* (NLT, NIV: survive); but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short (Matt. 24:22);

and (mockers to Jesus at the crucifixion),

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[120] For reference, the entirety of this latter half of the verse in Greek is as follows: ζημιωθήσεται (he will suffer loss) αὐτὸς (himself) δέ (but) σωθήσεται (he will be saved) οὕτως (so) δὲ (yet) ὡς (as) διὰ (through) πυρός (fire).

[121] Taylor, "Temple Builder," in *Federal View of Glorification*, 231 of 299.

[122] Cf. synoptic/similar uses of σῴζω in the context of healing from disease or demonic possession: Mark 5:23, 5:28-34, 6:56, 10:52; Luke 8:36, 8:48, 8:50, 17:19; Acts 4:9, 14:9.

> "…*save* Yourself by coming down from the cross!" In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes, were mocking Him among themselves and saying, "He *saved* others; He cannot *save* Himself!" (Mark 15:30-31);[123]

Within the 106 uses of σῴζω in the NT, approximately one-third of these uses occur in such non-soteriological contexts.[124] Further, this nuance of preservation or survival appears frequently throughout the extrabiblical Greek literature of the time, for example (emphases added):

> … the more such a man is beset by those who hate him and by those who plot against him, … if *he is to remain safe* for any time, must he be on the alert and use his wits, guarding against defeat by his enemies (Chrysostom);[125]

> … but endeavors to break up and destroy the way of life of the wise mind, holding that the latter is planning her ruin, while the former is devising the best means to *preserve* her (Philo).[126]

Even though Paul's use of σῴζω throughout his letters does predominantly refer to the believer's spiritual rescue through Christ,[127] the above examples set a solid precedent for σωθήσεται ("he will be saved") at least *potentially* describing some form of life maintenance (rather than salvation). Pinpointing which definition of σῴζω Paul uses here requires analyzing the meaning behind ζημιωθήσεται ("he will suffer loss"), the broader grammar of the verse, and the qualifying phrase διὰ πυρός ("through fire").

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[123] Cf. synoptic/similar uses of σῴζω in the context of life preservation: Matt. 8:25, 14:30, 27:40-49; Mark 3:4; Luke 6:9, 23:35-39; John 11:12; Acts 27:20, 27:31; Heb. 5:7; Jude 5.

[124] Word study of σῴζω conducted using Logos Bible software. Approximately 35 of the 106 uses occur in a healing or life preservation context.

[125] Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses: On Kingship 3*, trans J. W. Cohoon, Loeb Classical Library 257 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), 132-133, doi:10.4159/DLCL.dio_chrysostom-discourses_3_kingship_iii.1932.

[126] Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis 2, 3*, trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, Loeb Classical Library 226 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), 430-431, doi:10.4159/DLCL.philo_judaeus-allegorical_interpretation_genesis_i_ii.1929.

[127] E.g., Rom. 5:9-10; Eph. 2:8; 1 Tim. 2:4.

Firstly, commentators debate whether ζημιόω carries an active or passive undertone (i.e., to be punished vs. to have something taken away), with some arguing for its punitive connotation[128] and others arguing against it.[129] This verb only appears five other times in the NT,[130] each with the gloss "to suffer loss" or "to forfeit." However, each of these instances appear in the context of "forfeiting" one's *soul* (Matt. 16:26; Mark 8:36; Luke 9:25), or "suffering loss" that leads to a saving *repentance* (2 Cor. 7:9), or "suffering loss" so as to *gain Christ* (Phil. 3:8). These five uses all occur in a salvific-judgemental context; to "suffer loss" is contrasted with salvation. Further, most standard Greek lexicons note this simple meaning of "to suffer loss" but most also acknowledge the nuance of damage, penalty, or fine.[131] Outside of Scripture, this verb often appeared in ancient employment contracts to specify that if a worker failed to complete a certain assignment, then that worker would be *fined* or *punished*.[132] Therefore, considering (a) the consistent Scriptural dichotomy between 'suffering loss' and salvation, and (b) the Greco-Roman use of the verb to describe the worker who is fined for his poor workmanship, there is reasonable support for interpreting ζημιωθήσεται as depicting divine judgement upon those who failed to build well.

In most English translations, it appears as if Paul is allowing for conceptual overlap between σωθήσεται and ζημιωθήσεται (i.e., that one can "suffer loss" yet still "be saved"), but as

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[128] E.g., Taylor, "Temple Builder," in *Federal View of Glorification*, 227-230 of 299.

[129] E.g., Ciampa and Rosner, "Reflections," 176.

[130] Matt. 16:26; Mark 8:36; Luke 9:25; 2 Cor. 7:9; Phil. 3:8; word study conducted using Logos Bible software.

[131] G. Abbott-Smith, "ζημιόω," in *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922), 195; Alexander Souter, "ζημιόω," in *A Pocket Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1917), 105; "ζημιόω," in *The Lexham Analytical Lexicon to the Septuagint*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012); Conzelmann, "Divisions," 76.

[132] Taylor, "Temple Builder," in *Federal View of Glorification*, 228 of 299; Thiselton, "God's Building," 308, 314.

mentioned above, the NT consistently places these two pictures in diametrically opposed camps. The two are mutually exclusive, and the δέ (a less potently contrastive conjunction; "but," "yet" "and")[133] preceding σωθήσεται ("he will be saved") appears to support this understanding. Most commentators see this δέ as coloring σωθήσεται with a 'just barely' implication, that the Christian who builds poorly will retain their salvation 'just by the skin of their teeth' but will nonetheless "suffer loss" as their work is "burned up."[134] However, if Paul intended to depict this Christian as maintaining their salvation by the smallest of margins, then he likely would have used the much stronger adversive ἀλλά.[135] Not only does Paul's use of δέ make the overall severity of the statement much weaker, but the additional αὐτὸς ("himself") places the emphasis on the *individual's* fate and not that of his work.[136] Therefore, this δέ should be translated as a simple conjunction ("and") rather than as a contrastive particle ("but"): "he will be judged, *and* he will remain in judgement [originally "and he will survive"]."[137]

Paul then expands this statement by qualifying the individual's judgement as διὰ πυρός ("through fire"), and an analysis of this wording both inside and outside of the NT further supports verse 15b as referring to eschatological judgement. In contrast to σῴζω, the phrase διὰ πυρός only occurs twice more in the NT:

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[133] Taylor, "Temple Builder," in *Federal View of Glorification*, 230 of 299; Souter, "δέ," 59.

[134] E.g., Garland, "Evaluating God's Servants," in *1 Corinthians*, 112; Mark Taylor, "II. God's Wisdom for a Divided Church (1:10-4:21)," in *1 Corinthians: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, eds. E. Ray Clendenen and David S. Dockery, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 28:3g, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[135] Taylor, "Temple Builder," in *Federal View of Glorification*, 230 of 299.

[136] Ibid.

[137] Ibid.; without going beyond the scope of this manuscript and delving deeply into the nature of hell, it should be noted that the 'survival' and 'life maintenance' nuances of σῴζω discussed here specifically refer the awareness the unbeliever would have in eternal judgement; just as both the righteous and the unrighteous will be resurrected on the final day, the righteous will rise to live in restoration and glorification, the unrighteous will rise to remain in everlasting condemnation.

> In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which perishes though tested *by fire*, may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:6-7);
>
> For this reason in one day her (Babylon's) plagues will come, plague and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up *with fire*; for the Lord God who judges her is strong (Rev. 18:8).

Peter uses this phrase to describe how endurance through persecution (cf. 1 Pet. 1:6-7) will refine and strengthen his audience's faith; persevering through "fire" will result in a faith that will be confirmed as genuine. John's Revelation uses this same phrase to depict the divine judgement of the eschatological, anti-God political-religious system "Lady Babylon."[138, 139] Peter and John both depict the two soteriological outcomes of going "through fire"—for the righteous, this fire assures and confirms the salvation, but for the unrighteous, this fire comes in divine judgement. This conforms well with Paul's use of διὰ πυρός here in verse fifteen, as Paul similarly depicts the dichotomous results of the same testing fire. Nonetheless, this small number of NT occurrences of διὰ πυρός presents a challenge to the exegete and pushes the interpreter to examine its use in the greater ancient Greco-Roman and Jewish world. Interestingly, this phrase often appears extra-biblically in the context of covenantal curses, not serving as an idiomatic expression but describing the fate of a covenant breaker.[140] This not only fits with the punitive

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[138] The commonality of Lady Babylon and the flimsy works of the unfaithful being "burned up" (κατακαήσεται in 1 Cor. 3:15; κατακαυθήσεται in Rev. 18:8) should be noted. Just as Lady Babylon's works of political seduction and immorality (Rev. 18:1-7) reflected her rebellion against God and subsequently incurred divine wrath, so will the works of the unfaithful reveal their unfaithfulness and similarly evoke judgement (1 Cor. 3:15).

[139] G. K. Beale, "Commentary: 17:1-19:21: Final Judgement of Babylon and the Beast," in *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, eds. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 803, 842, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[140] Taylor, "Temple Builder," in *Federal View of Glorification*, 235 of 299.

use of ζημιωθήσεται ("he will suffer loss") in ancient work contracts (see above), but it also of conforms with the idea of Christ's blood creating a New Covenant with God's people (Jer. 31:31-33; Ezek. 36:26-27; Luke 22:20; Heb. 7:22, 8:6): those who turn their backs on this New Covenant established upon Christ (vv. 10-11), as demonstrated through their poor building efforts (vv. 13, 15), will ultimately face judgement.[141]

A broader look at the use of πῦρ ("fire") through the NT further supports this conclusion, as approximately 30 percent of the 71 occurrences do *not* refer to the eschatological fire of divine judgement, and these minority instances could be categorized as depicting either a typical earthly fire (whether literal or used in metaphor), referring to the character and/or appearance of God/Christ, or is debated in its meaning.[142] In other words, 70 percent of the uses of πῦρ in the NT describe the destiny of the condemned, and nowhere else does Scripture speak of genuine believers facing this fire on the Last Day.[143] Altogether, the phrase διὰ πυρός does not depict certain "Christians" receiving salvation 'just by the skin of their teeth' and the fiery consumption

[141] Throughout the OT, Yahweh repeatedly and graphically details the severe consequences Israel would (and did) experience if/when she repeatedly and unrepentantly broke covenant with her God, and the utmost form of judgement included exile, becoming a "heap of ruins," and Yahweh giving Israel a "certificate of divorce" (e.g., 1 Kgs. 9:6-8, Jer. 3:6-8, 34:18-21). These were the just repercussions for breaking covenant, and only God's astounding grace and mercy allowed Israel to not be "cut off" despite her continuous infidelity (Jer. 34:11-25; Isa. 48:9; Rom. 11:1-25). However, the NT makes clear that God will not have such mercy for the faithless in the final judgement (Matt. 25:31-33, 41, 45-46; 2 Thess. 1:5-10; Rev. 20:11-15).

[142] Word study of πῦρ conducted using Logos Bible software. Out of 71 uses, approximately 22 instances do not refer to the fire of judgement. These 22 uses fall under depicting a typical earthly fire (whether literal or used in metaphor; Matt. 17:15; Mark 9:22; Luke 9:54, 17:29, 22:55; Acts 2:3, 28:5; Rom. 12:20; Heb. 11:34; Jas 3:5, 3:6; 1 Pet. 1:7), a description of God's/Christ's appearance or character (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16; Acts 7:30; Heb. 1:7; Rev. 1:14, 2:18, 4:5, 10:1, 19:12), or is ambiguous (Mark 9:49).

[143] Paul only utilized πῦρ five times in his NT writings, and three of those five instances occur here in 1 Corinthians 3:13-15. Of the remaining two uses, one of them is an OT quotation (Rom. 12:20; cf. Prov. 25:21-22), and the other appears in Paul's depiction of Christ's return in judgement: " … when the Lord Jesus is revealed … in flaming *fire*, inflicting vengeance on those … who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus," (2 Thess. 1:8). While this use of πῦρ in 2 Thessalonians constitutes the only other place the word appears in Paul's letters, it does conform with the interpretation of πῦρ in 1 Cor. 13-15 proposed above.

of their cheap building projects,[144] but it rather describes the ultimate judgement the unfaithful will face as breakers of the New Covenant founded upon Christ.

All this information then informs how σωθήσεται ("he will be saved") should be interpreted. As discussed above, the NT uses this verb σῴζω in reference to spiritual salvation, but its alternative definition of life preservation or survival also appears frequently both within the NT and within extrabiblical Greek literature. Overall, the likely punitive nature of ζημιωθήσεται ("he will suffer loss"), the mutual exclusivity of salvation and ζημιόω throughout the NT, the use of the weaker adversive δέ, and the overall condemnatory connotation of διὰ πυρός ("through fire") all indicate that σωθήσεται should be read as one keeping their life to endure judgement—not 'just barely' receiving salvation. This also conforms well with the OT allusions to the "temple's" eschatological refinement, that when God comes to his Church-temple, he will sort out who truly belongs to him and who will fall under divine condemnation (see the exegesis of v. 13 above). Therefore, verse fifteen could be paraphrased as, "If anyone's works do not reflect the true faith in Christ, he will be punished; he will have life, yet only in judgement."

By first fleshing out verse fifteen, the nature of verse fourteen's (and verse eight's) "reward" (μισθὸν, from μισθός; contrasted with ζημιωθήσεται from v. 15) that the faithful believer receives may be illuminated. Most who adhere to the conventional understanding of heavenly rewards, despite often advocating for a more tangible prize such as crowns (discussed

[144] Cf. Thiselton, "God's Building," 315; Hans Conzelmann ("1:10-4:21: The Divisions in the Community," in *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ed. George W. MacRae, trans. James W. Leitch, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible [Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1975], 77, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvb6v88r.7) interestingly justifies this common (but theologically perplexing) conclusion with a coin analogy: on one side, a lack of faith produces poor works, but poor works do not render the Christian damnable; on the opposite side, good works do not warrant salvation, but Christians' works will nonetheless be examined for proper quality. This interpretation is attractive, but this manuscript's investigation into the exact phrases used here in verses 14-15 support a different understanding of Paul's words.

in a later chapter), admit that while this "reward" is obscure, it ultimately conveys God's divine stamp of approval and/or a personal satisfaction with one's faithful ministerial efforts.[145] This understanding is not incorrect by any means, but it likely contains a much greater significance. Firstly, just like his OT temple allusions, Paul's "reward" notion points to his Jewish background, as Jewish theology had a well-rounded expectation of future reward for the faithful.[146] For example, Matthew's Gospel, which was written to a Jewish audience,[147] utilizes this language prominently to describe the wonderful future of those devoted to Christ; out of the 29 occurrences of μισθός throughout the NT, ten (over one-third!) come from Matthew alone.[148] Interestingly, however, other biblical writers implement μισθός to also describe the just outcome of the rebellious, such as 2 Peter 2:13 (emphasis added): "But these (false prophets; cf. 2:1), … using abusive speech where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction … also be destroyed, suffering wrong as the *wages* of wrongdoing."[149] Further, other verses use μισθός to describe what is *deserved*, such as 1 Timothy 5:18 in quoting Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7 (emphasis added): "For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle the ox while it is threshing,' and 'The laborer is worthy of his *wages*.'"[150] Standard Greek lexicons also affirm this point of

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[145] E.g., Blomberg, "Degrees of Reward?" 165; Ciampa and Rosner, "Reflections," 177; Schreiner, "Unity," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:93; Ellis, "True and False Wisdom," 150.

[146] Menahem Kister, "Deeds, Reward, and Divine Mercy: Jewish Views and Pauline Passages," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 52, no. 4–5 (2021): 580, https://doi.org/10.1163/15700631-12511312.

[147] Elwell and Yarbrough, "4: The Gospel of Matthew: The Messiah Has Come!" 65.

[148] Word study of μισθός conducted using Logos Bible software. These ten times include 5:12, 5:46, 6:1, 6:2, 6:5, 6:16, 10:41 (2x), 10:42, and 20:8.

[149] Other passages that use μισθός similarly include Acts 1:18 and Jude 11.

[150] Other passages that use μισθός similarly include Matt. 20:8, Romans 4:4, 1 Cor. 9:18, James 5:4, Rev. 22:12.

μισθός conveying a rightful payment or recompense of one's work.[151] All these points suggest that μισθός here in verse fourteen does not refer to something *added* to salvation, as if some kind of "bonus for doing a good job," but rather to the just compensation for one's demonstration of genuine faith by embellishing the temple with imperishable metal and stone[152]—that is, salvation. Verses 16-17 reiterate this point, as the apostle explains that any who endanger the Church-temple by building with flammable materials will ultimately be consumed himself. Additionally, the first-century use of μισθός in extrabiblical Greek sources does not parallel our modern, twenty-first century English notion of reward.[153] This time period did not contain the predominantly materialistic value system prominent in current Western society; in contrast, these ancients like Paul highly valued honor and integrity.[154] Therefore, even if the apostle *was* speaking some extra prize given to the especially faithful, it almost certainly would not go beyond receiving greater praise from God (cf. 4:4-5).[155] The context of the entire passage, with the OT temple imagery, the eschatological framework, the ANE and Scriptural uses of certain verbs and phrases, the grammar of verse fifteen, and the nuances of μισθός all point to this

[151] Abbott-Smith, "μισθός," 294; Souter, "μισθός," 162; "μισθός," in *Lexham Analytical Lexicon*; Mounce, William D. Mounce, "Lexicon: μισθός," in *Basics of Biblical Greek: Grammar*, Third ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 206.

[152] Taylor, "Temple Builder," in *Federal View of Glorification*, 226 of 299.

[153] Ibid., 242 of 299.

[154] Ciampa and Rosner, "Reflections," 170.

[155] Commentators generally recognize this connection between 3:10-15 and 4:4-5, and most understand the works that are "burnt up" as referring to "self-centered, sinful, and unworthy" efforts that will not have eternal impacts (e.g., Thiselton, "God's Building," 304-305, 312-313). While this is assessment is not incorrect, the discussion above argues for a much more nuanced reading.

passage drawing a contrast *not* between believers, but between true believers and the condemned.[156]

Conclusion on Paul's Building Metaphor

Commentators and theologians often interpret this text as establishing a basis for works-based heavenly rewards amongst believers, that these six verses depict a judgement solely involving believers wherein the more faithful and careful builders will receive greater eschatological prizes while the lazier, less fruitful builders will "suffer loss" yet retain their salvation. However, several contextual and grammatical components point to an entirely different meaning: this judgement will reveal the true, authentic Church by purifying her of those with an unsubstantiated, insincere faith. Paul penned this letter in response to the pagan mindset infiltrating the Corinthian church and the resulting division emerging within the congregation. In this first section where the relevant passage sits, the apostle explains the futility of identifying with a specific teacher since all true wisdom comes from the Spirit and such a common source of wisdom should naturally produce unity (not factionalism) within a Christ-centered congregation (1:10-31). He goes on to demonstrate that individual leaders have no room for boasting, since it is ultimately God alone who can give Kingdom growth (3:5-9). This does not nullify the believer's responsibility for faithful building efforts, however, as Paul's following supporting architectural picture demonstrates (vv. 10-17).

Utilizing his Jewish heritage and knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures, Paul describes the body of believers as a building established upon the sole foundation of Christ (vv. 10-11). The

[156] This passage's depiction of the Church's eschatological refinement where Christ will separate the righteous from the unrighteous pairs well with other portions of this letter where the apostle warns the Corinthian Christians of trusting in any wisdom other than Christ (3:18-23), anathematizes those in the church openly engaging in sexual immorality (5:2, 5, 11-13), and exhorts the congregation to avoid Israel's condemnable mistakes of idolatry and distrusting God (10:7-13). The implicit contrast in these passages is between genuinely transformed believers and "false" or nominal "Christians," supporting a similar conclusion here in 3:10-17.

language used in this text alludes to several OT verses narrating the construction of Solomon's Temple and how God will eventually arrive to his eschatological "temple" in judgement to refine his people—to separate the authentic (building upon the foundation with gold, silver, and stone) from the feigning (building with wood, hay, and straw) (v. 12). God will perform this evaluation by testing the durability of each one's construction with the fires of judgement (v. 13), unveiling the true heart of each individual by their works (cf. 4:4-5). Those with magnificent, indestructible designs erected upon the Christ-foundation reflect their authentic devotion to Christ and will subsequently receive their just wage: the inheritance of eternal life bought with his blood (v. 14; cf. Col. 3:23-24). In contrast, this judgement will simultaneously reveal the hollow and disingenuous "faith" of those who built with combustible and unstable resources, for they will be preserved to endure their just punishment (v. 15). After all, any who threaten the temple and build with materials unworthy of the Christ-foundation will assuredly be destroyed (vv. 16-17). In short, the Corinthians must abandon the divisions developing within their congregation because (1) only God can be praised for Kingdom growth (v. 10), (2) they will ultimately be held accountable for how they built up the Church upon Christ (vv. 11-13), and (3) this final assessment will inevitably uncover the impostors from the true Kingdom builders (vv. 14-17).

To be sure, this interpretation does *not* advocate for a works-based salvation; rather, it supports the NT's general conclusion that one's actions will reflect his heart, as an authentic belief and submission to Christ will be supported with Christ-like works (see Jas. 2:14-26). Therefore, those building with imperishable materials will demonstrate themselves as true followers of Christ, whereas those utilizing flimsy resources will unmask their faith as equally

weak.[157] This reading is admittedly contrary to the broad consensus amongst modern commentators, but a close examination of the OT allusions, the specific phrases implemented, and the broader topic of internal divisions supports Paul's metaphor as drawing the line between truly devoted Christ-followers and those whose "faith" is exposed as easily consumable—*not* as foretelling of a heavenly hierarchy amongst believers based on their earthly deeds.

Other eschatological passages within the epistle complement this interpretation, specifically 1:4-9, 4:1-5, 5:5-13, 6:9-10, and 9:24-25. Paul explains that the spiritual gifts present among the Corinthian congregation testify to the presence of Christ among them (1:4-5), but Christ will ultimately confirm their blamelessness and immunity from judgement through the believer's steadfastness in the faith (1:6-9; cf. Col. 1:21-23; 1 Thess. 3:8-13).[158] This final day will uncover the depths of the heart's motivations behind every individual (4:5) and show whether one's stewardship of the "mysteries of God" (i.e., the gospel; cf. 2:1, 7) proved both trust- and praiseworthy as an authentic servant of Christ (4:1-2, 5).[159] Here, Paul reiterates the eschatological examination of 3:10-15 in non-metaphorical terms; the way one builds upon the foundation of Christ represents one's deepest core motivations and devotions.

On the other side of this divine judgement, Paul assures that those engaging in sinful lifestyles (drunkenness, sexual immorality, abuse, etc.) yet still claiming themselves as Christian brothers (5:5, 11; 6:9-10) will be in for a rude awakening as they should be immediately excommunicated from the Church (5:11-13) in hopes that the depths of their sin would effectively soften their hearts towards Christ (5:5), lest they not be among the heirs to the

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[157] Cf. other passages speaking of a similar separation, such as Matt. 7:15-23, Rom. 2:13, and Tit. 1:16.

[158] Schreiner, "1 Introduction (1:1-9): B. Thanksgiving," in *1 Corinthians,* 7:56.

[159] Schreiner, "Unity," in *1 Corinthians,* 7:98.

Kingdom (6:9-10). These verses imply that no one genuinely committed to Christ would regularly and unrepentantly live in such anti-Christian ways—*actions reveal the heart's true allegiances*.

Further, those who will receive the "imperishable wreath" of eternal life prove themselves faithful with their perseverance in pursuing Christ, steadily running (or *building*; cf. 3:10b, 13-14) towards the eschatological finish line with the hope of salvation (9:24-25; see Chapter 4). The above interpretation of 3:10-15 does not stand alone in the epistle, as the apostle continually returns to this contrast between the true believer who lives in a manner worthy of Christ, accrediting all to God's grace (3:6b, 10a; 15:10), and the false "Christian" whose ungodly living reflects an unredeemed heart.

III. Luke's Parable of the Minas (19:11-27)

This exegetical investigation now turns to another staple NT passage in the discussion of earned eschatological rewards for believers: the parable of the minas (or pounds) recorded towards the end of Luke's gospel. Just like 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, a quick reading of this parabolic story evidently demonstrates that believers' future individual positions within the eschatological Kingdom will ultimately be determined by their fruitfulness during their earthly lives. In summary, a nobleman leaves his homeland to be crowned as king and then eventually return, but two storylines emerge concerning this new king: (1) he faces intense opposition from his future constituents due to his notorious reputation, and (2) in his absence, he administers a test of faithfulness to his trusted servants wherein each worker must "do business" (19:13) and increase a small sum of the nobleman's money. The new king then returns home, he rewards the faithful stewards with authority proportional to their profit, rebukes the disobedient, and the parable concludes with the king executing those who opposed his rule. At first glance, this appears to teach that Christ will eventually return as King to institute a hierarchy of authority amongst believers based on their dutifulness to Christ on earth. However, a holistic reading of the parable in light of its location within Luke's gospel reveals the parable's strong emphasis *not* on differing heavenly rewards, but on the arrival of Christ's Kingdom, Christ's controversial Kingship, and, most significantly, the picture of *true* discipleship and Kingdom citizenship.

A Brief Note on Matthew's Similar Parable (25:14-30)

Commentators generally agree that Matthew's parable of the talents and Luke's parable of the minas contain the same core narrative and almost certainly have a common origin based

on their similar format and phraseology.[160] Scholars disagree on the exact literary relationship—whether one Evangelist borrowed from the other,[161] whether Jesus modified the same story in two separate situations,[162] whether both accounts are variations of an original parable,[163] etc.—but nearly all concur that some close relationship exists due to the extremely similar formats (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. Comparison of the Matthean and Lukan stewardship parables.

Matthew's (M) Parable of the Talents (25:14-30)	**Luke's (L) Parable of the Minas (19:11-27)**
Has an eschatological context: third parable in a series of parables describing the coming Kingdom in Matt. 24-25 (v. 14).	Contextualized by the Triumphal Entry: told to correct the expectation that the Kingdom would fully arrive with Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem (v. 11).
The man goes on an unspecific "journey" (v. 14).	The man leaves to gain a kingdom (v. 12).
A man with slaves leaves his home for a while and entrusts his slaves with money that they are to increase by the time of his return (M v. 14; L vv. 12-13).	
The money is distributed according to ability, with one servant receiving five talents, another two, and the third one (v. 15).	Ten amounts are distributed evenly across the ten slaves with one mina per slave (v. 13).
One talent equaled about 20 years' wages.	One mina equaled a few months' wages.

[160] E.g., I. Howard Marshall, "The Ministry in Jerusalem (19:11-21:38): A. The Parable of the Pounds (19:11-27)," in *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 812 of 1095, https://consideringthebiblehome.files.wordpress.com/2021/10/the-gospel-of-luke-a-commentary-on-the-greek-text-by-i.-howard-marshall.epub_.pdf; Piotr Blajer, "The Parable of the Pounds or Talents: One Story in Two Different Contexts," *Liber Annuus* 63 (2013): 292, https://doi.org/10.1484/J.LA.5.105597; John Nolland, "Reaching the City of Destiny (18:35-19:46): Going to a Distant Land to Receive Kingly Power (19:11-28)," in *Luke 18:35-24:53*, eds. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, Ralph P. Martin, and Lynn Allan Losie, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 35C:166 of 757, Hoopla Digital Ebooks.

[161] E.g., Nolland, "Kingly Power," 35C:198, 200 of 948.

[162] E.g., Blajer, "Pounds or Talents," 292.

[163] E.g., Bovon, "The Parable of the Minas," 607.

Matthew's (M) Parable of the Talents (25:14-30)	**Luke's (L) Parable of the Minas (19:11-27)**
Three slaves are given money (v. 15).	Ten slaves are given money, but the parable later focuses on three slaves (v. 13, 15-20).
There is no commentary on the man's public image.	The man is hated by his community, and citizens try to block his kingship with a delegation (v. 14).
There is a description of the slaves' work with the money is given (vv. 16-18).	There is no description of the slaves' work.
The slaves are summoned to report their profits "after a long time" (v. 19).	The slaves are summoned to report their profits after the man becomes king (v. 15).
There are two faithful slaves and one unfaithful (M vv. 15-26; L vv.16-21).	
The two faithful slaves each double their money (vv. 20-23).	The first faithful slave earns ten times his money, and the second double (vv. 16-19).
The man's praise is identical for the two faithful slaves (vv. 21, 23).	The king's praise differs between the two slaves (vv. 17, 19).
The reward is identical for the two faithful slaves: "Enter into the joy of your master," (vv. 21, 23).	The reward is proportional between the two faithful slaves: ten cities for the first, five for the second (vv. 17, 19).
The phrase, "You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things," is repeated for both faithful slaves (vv. 21, 23).	The phrase "Since you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to have authority ..." only appears for the first slave but is assumed for the second (v. 17).
The unfaithful slave buried his money in the ground (vv. 24-25).	The unfaithful slave hid his money in a cloth.
The unfaithful slave explains their disobedience by accusing the man of harshness and exploitation; the unfaithful slave did nothing because he was afraid of risking and losing his master's money (M vv. 24-25; L. vv. 20-21).	
The man repeats the unfaithful slave's justification and asks why the slave did not, at least, place the money in the bank to earn interest (nearly no risk; M vv. 26-27; L vv. 22-23).	

Matthew's (M) Parable of the Talents (25:14-30)	**Luke's (L) Parable of the Minas (19:11-27)**
The unfaithful slave's money is given to the first slave (M v. 28; L v. 24).	
There is no protest about the first slave receiving the unfaithful slave's money.	There is a protest to the first slave receiving the unfaithful slave's money (v. 25).
The man explains giving the first slave the third slave's money with, "To everyone who has, more shall be given, but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away." (v. M v. 29; L v. 26).	
The third slave is judged with eschatological language (hell; v. 30).	There is nothing explicitly said about the third slave, but those who opposed the man's kingship are sentenced to death (v. 27).

However, this manuscript will solely focus on the Lukan version simply because the variations in his account significantly raise the exegetical difficulty in comparison to Matthew's; the Matthean version is rather straightforward, whereas Luke's is more convoluted, especially regarding the topic at hand. Matthew's account comes as the third parable in a series of end-times related teachings on the nature of the coming judgement told by Jesus right before the Passover events leading up to his crucifixion.[164] Therefore, the parable has an obvious eschatological context, supported by its use of eschatological language.[165] Further, Matthew's parable explicitly teaches of *equal* reward for those who use their gifts and abilities faithfully; each good servant doubled his seed money (vv. 20, 22), received the same praise from the master (vv. 21, 23), and gained

[164] Matthew's parable of the talents (25:14-30) is immediately preceded by the parable of the ten virgins (25:1-13), a warning to be ready for Christ's return (24:36-51), the parable of the fig tree (24:32-35), and signs that Christ will soon be returning (24:1-31). The parable of the talents is then followed by an explanation of the final judgement (25:31-46) and Judas' betrayal (26:1-5, 14-19).

[165] Several phrases within the parable point to its emphasis on the future Kingdom and final judgement, such as, "For it (the "kingdom of heaven," cf. v. 1) is just like …" (v. 14), "…enter into the joy of your master," (vv. 21, 23)," and "…into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth," (v. 30; cf. 8:12; 22:13).

the same reward of being invited into the "joy of [their] master," (vv. 21, 23). Matthew's parable clearly exhorts Christians to faithful stewardship of Kingdom resources during this interim period because of the account they will have to give upon Christ's return. In contrast, Jesus tells Luke's version of the parable at a completely different time in his ministry, under different circumstances, and with different goals (see Literary Context). Further, Luke's parable weaves in themes of a hated king and claiming a throne alongside stewardship (see Exegesis),[166] and the Lukan slaves are given *unequal* amounts of authority in the kingdom dependent on their profit (vv. 16-19)—implying proportional heavenly rewards for believers. In essence, the discussion below will omit Matthew's version simply because it does not present a case for unequal heavenly rewards at all, whereas Luke's parable plausibly supports this common understanding of added eschatological prizes for the especially faithful.

Historical-Cultural Context

Each of the gospels presents the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ from a unique perspective with specific emphases on his character and influence while on earth. Accordingly, just as with the Pauline epistles, the Evangelists wrote their accounts under distinctive historical circumstances and for a certain early Christian audience, and any proper interpretation of the gospels necessitates answering these contextual questions.

Regarding authorship, Church tradition and the testimony of several Church Fathers hold that Luke, a first-century physician and "inseparable companion" (Irenaeus) of Paul,[167] did, in

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[166] Marshall, "Parable of the Pounds," 812 of 1095.

[167] The book of Acts is also traditionally attributed to Luke, and his close friendship with Paul can be observed in the many narratives of Paul's missionary journeys (cf. Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11); Elwell and Yarbrough, "6: The Gospel of Luke: A Savior for All People," 84; John T. Carroll, "Introduction," in *Luke: A Commentary*, eds. C. Clifton Black, M. Eugene Boring, and John T. Carroll, The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 2, ProQuest Ebook Central; Thomas R. Schreiner, "Luke: Introduction to Luke," in

fact, pen this record of Jesus.[168] The gospel does not name its author, just as the other gospels omit their writer, but there is little reason to reject these early historical affirmations of legitimate Lukan authorship.[169] Not much is certain about the person of Luke beyond that he served as a doctor and Paul's trusted confidant; however, assuming this conservative position of Lukan authorship, many details about his life can be surmised from his gospel. Firstly, the research process detailed in the first few verses of his record (1:1-4) indicates that he highly valued presenting his gospel as factual and verifiably true.[170] Further, the sophisticated level of Greek grammar utilized (and his occupation as a physician) demonstrate Luke to have been thoroughly educated and, therefore, of high social status.[171] The Evangelist's ethnoreligious status, on the other hand, remains uncertain; he displays a deep knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures,[172] implying a Jewish heritage, but the overall aim of his gospel seems to revolve around the inclusion of the Gentiles into God's redemption story while the Jews reject their long-awaited Messiah-King (see Literary Context). Scholars tend to opine that Luke was, indeed, of Gentile origin but extensively taught in the Judeo-Christian tradition (cf. 1:1-2),[173] making him a prime candidate to argue through his gospel for the veracity of this Jewish Messiah as also the Gentile

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Matthew – Luke, eds. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton, and Jay Skylar, ESV Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 8:956, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[168] Elwell and Yarbrough, "Luke," 84; Carroll, "Introduction," 2; Schreiner, "Introduction," in *Matthew – Luke*, 8:956.

[169] Elwell and Yarbrough, "Luke," 84.

[170] Ibid., 87.

[171] Carroll, "Introduction," 3.

[172] E.g., 2:23 (Ex. 13:2); 3:4-6 (Isa. 40:3-5); 8:10 (Isa. 6:9); 10:27 (Deut. 6:5); 18:20 (Exod. 20:12); 22:37 (Isa. 53:12); 23:46 (Ps. 31:5).

[173] Carroll, "Introduction," 2; Elwell and Yarbrough, "Luke," 87.

Savior.[174] Despite the gospel's direct address to Theophilus (1:1-4), likely a Roman official who had been similarly taught in the Judeo-Christian tradition (1:1-2),[175] Luke probably anticipated the circulation of his account among those within Theophilus' circle of Gentile Christians knowledgeable in the OT and Jewish history (1:1-4).[176]

Where, exactly, within the Greco-Roman world Theophilus and his compatriots lived when they received Luke's gospel, along with where Luke was writing from, are both highly debatable.[177] Nonetheless, the oppressive force of the Roman Empire plays a central role throughout the gospel,[178] implying a Roman place of writing and/or Theophilus living under Roman rule. The prominent debate regarding Luke's gospel involves the date of its composition—specifically whether Luke wrote his account before or after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD.[179] Scholars range in their estimations from the early 60s to the early 90s, with most opting for a date closely surrounding the Roman siege.[180] Taking all these details together, it appears that Luke addresses a generally Gentile audience with the intention to (1) encourage their faith by laying out the historical events of Jesus' life, (2) explain how the OT and Israel's history led to the inclusion of all humanity in God's redemptive story, and (3) teach on right,

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[174] Carroll, "Introduction," 5; Elwell and Yarbrough, "Luke," 87.

[175] Elwell and Yarbrough, "Luke," 87.

[176] Carroll, "Introduction," 3; Beth Kreitzer, Timothy George, and Scott M. Manetsch, eds., "Introduction to Luke," in *Luke*, Reformation Commentary on Scripture: New Testament (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 3:xlvii, ProQuest Ebook Central; David E. Garland, "Introduction to Luke," in *Luke*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series: New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 31, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[177] Ibid.

[178] Ibid.

[179] Schreiner, "Introduction," in *Matthew – Luke*, 8:957.

[180] Ibid.

bold Christian living under a government that murdered their Savior and has been executing Christians left and right.[181]

Moving from the gospel's general historical context to that of the specific scene in 19:11-27, Jesus tells the parable of the minas as he and his group of followers are coming through Jericho en route to Jerusalem for the annual Passover celebration (19:1; 22:1). Luke notes that Jesus told this parable right before entering Jerusalem and commencing the events of Holy Week to dissuade these earliest Christians' assumption that the full eschatological Kingdom would arrive with his entrance into the Holy City (v. 11). By understanding the eschatological significance of both Jerusalem and Passover, this contextual statement by Luke places the reader in the mind of Jesus' hearers. The annual Passover festivities reignited Israel's redemptive hope as the Jewish people looked towards the eschatological Exodus-like restoration promised in their future by reflecting upon Yahweh's deliverance thousands of years before (Exod. 12).[182]
The four hundred years of divine silence also left Israel desperate for divine intervention, creating ever-heightening hopes for *something* around Passover, year after year.[183] Further, the Jewish people deeply understood Jerusalem as a city pregnant with eschatological significance.[184] For example, the temple stood in Jerusalem (2 Chr. 6:7), several OT prophecies speak of Yahweh/the Messiah reigning over earth from the city (e.g., Zech. 14:4; Mic. 4:7; Isa. 2:2-4), the Messiah was expected to descend from the Mount of Olives as he declared the Kingdom (just outside Jerusalem) (Zech. 14:4), and Jewish tradition held that the eventual resurrection of the

[181] For example, Paul was executed by the Roman Empire in the mid-60s; Carroll, "Introduction," 4.

[182] Juho Sankamo, "Jesus' Entry into Jerusalem," *Approaching Religion* 4, no. 2 (December 2014): 34-35, doi:10.30664/ar.67547.

[183] Ibid.

[184] Nolland, "Kingly Power," 35C:200 of 948.

dead would occur in the Valley of Jehoshaphat (in between the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem) (cf. Joel 3:2, 12).[185] Therefore, as Jesus and his followers approach Jerusalem for Passover and he tells the parable the minas, his hearers' minds are likely focused on the promised hope of redemption. Combining these details with Jesus' previous teachings in Luke's gospel regarding the Kingdom as an already-inaugurated, *present* reality (e.g., 11:20, 13:18-21, 17:20-21),[186] his recent statement that Messianic prophecies will, in fact, be fulfilled once he enters Jerusalem (18:31-34; cf. 19:11),[187] and the arrival of restoration "immediately" and "today" (18:43; 19:9; see Literary Context), those surrounding Jesus understandably expect him to establish the full eschatological Kingdom with his entrance into Jerusalem (cf. 19:11), prompting this parable on the already-*but-not-yet* nature of the Kingdom.

However, many scholars conclude that Jesus did not tell this parable as pure allegory but instead utilized the then-notorious historical story of Archelaus to drive home the multifaceted points of his teaching (see Exegesis).[188] This will be discussed further in the relevant portions of exegesis below, but the basic history is as follows: after the death of King Herod the Great (whose Roman-sponsored reign over Judea was infamously cruel; cf. Matt. 2:7-23) around the turn of the millennium, one of his sons, Archelaus, left for Rome to be confirmed as his father's

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[185] Bovon, "Parable of the Minas," 610.

[186] Schreiner, "Luke: Luke 19:11-27," in *Matthew – Luke*, 8:1392.

[187] Blajer, "Pounds or Talents," 282.

[188] E.g., Marshall, "Parable of the Pounds," 812 of 1095; Nolland, "Kingly Power," 35C:200-201 of 948; Carroll, "Luke 9:51-19:27: Ministry Continues as Jesus Journeys to Jerusalem: 19:11-27: Approach to Jerusalem and the Approach of God's Reign," 379; Craig L. Blomberg, "Chapter 31: Common Exegetical Fallacies in New Testament Scholarship Rectifiable through External Evidence," in *The Language and Literature of the New Testament: Essays in Honor of Stanley E. Porter's 60th Birthday*, eds/.Lois K. Fuller Dow, Craig A. Evans, and Andrew W. Pitts, Biblical Interpretation Series (Boston, NY: Brill, 2017), 150:732, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1428714&site=ehost-live&scope=site&custid=liberty&authtype=ip,shib&ebv=EB&ppid=pp_VIII.

successor to the throne by Emperor Augustus; Archelaus then faced an inevitable Jewish opposition to his governorship because of his father's reputation and the correct assumption that he would be similarly tyrannical.[189] Some commentators reject or are wary of the conclusion that Jesus had Archelaus specifically in mind when giving this parable,[190] but the details are too similar to be coincidental. Further, Archelaus' palace was located right there in Jericho where Jesus and his followers were passing through[191]—Jesus' crowd would have very likely associated the geography and the parable's mentions of a journey to gain kingship (v. 12), the sending of a delegation in opposition (v. 14), and the public execution of opponents to the throne (v. 27) with the well-known tyrannical reign of Archelaus over Judea just a few decades prior.

Literary Context

Luke's gospel has a relatively simple structure comprised of four main sections: Jesus' birth, childhood, and ministry announcement (1:1-4:15), Jesus' ministry through Galilee (4:14-9:50), Jesus' ministry travels from Galilee to Jerusalem (9:51-19:27), and Holy Week through the resurrection (19:28-24:53).[192] The main body of the gospel (4:14-24:53) where the parable of the minas appears (19:11-27) has a slightly obscure internal structure,[193] but four "cycles" can be detected (4:14-9:50; 9:51-13:21; 13:22-19:27; 19:28-24:53)—a literary pattern common to the ancient world.[194] As Jesus moves closer and closer to Jerusalem throughout the first three cycles

[189] Marshall, "Parable of the Pounds," 815 of 1095; Nolland, "Kingly Power," 35C:203 of 948; Carroll, "Approach to Jerusalem," 379; Blomberg, "Common Exegetical Fallacies," 150:732.

[190] E.g., Bovon, "Parable of the Minas," 609, 612.

[191] Blomberg, "Common Exegetical Fallacies," 150:732.

[192] Carroll, "Introduction," 15.

[193] Schreiner, "Introduction," in *Matthew – Luke*, 8:960.

[194] Garland, "Introduction," in *Luke*, 31.

(4:14-19:27), Luke organizes and narrates Jesus' teachings to develop a picture of a true disciple of Christ—of a bona fide citizen in the Kingdom of God (e.g., 6:20-36; 9:57-62; 14:25-33). To legitimately follow Christ equates to actively loving one's enemies (6:27-29), doing good without the expectation of goodness in return (6:35), fully committing to the cause of Christ (9:57-62), and being willing to forsake family, possessions, and even life itself for the gospel (14:25-33), just to name a few examples. Notably, these 'requirements' do not depict works-righteousness but rather communicate the sobering price of living as an authentic, devoted Christ follower. In other words, those truly within the Kingdom will live with radical obedience to the King in complete dedication to him. This notion will comprise the primary principle of Luke's parable of the minas (see Exegesis below).

Parallel to this theme of discipleship throughout 4:14-19:27, Luke simultaneously and repeatedly notes the growing animosity between Jesus and the Jewish people.[195] For example, Luke regularly records Jesus addressing the Pharisees' pride, legalism, greed, and hypocrisy (e.g., 11:37-54, 12:1-3; 16:14-15), the Jews actively rejecting Jesus' Messianic claims (e.g., 4:28-30), and the Pharisees' degradation of Jesus (e.g., 6:6-11; 14:1-6; 15:1-2).[196] Luke builds up this tension until it eventually explodes at the Jewish-approved crucifixion of Jesus (23:13-25),[197] but as the exegesis below will demonstrate, the parable of the minas contributes significantly to this building expectation of Jewish rejection.

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[195] See passages such as 4:22-30, 11:37-54, 12:1-12, and 15:1-2; Garland, "Introduction," in *Luke*, 31; Robert F. O'Toole, "Reflections on Luke's Treatment of Jews in Luke-Acts," *Biblica* 74, no. 4 (1993): 533, http://www.jstor.com/stable/42611354.

[196] Garland, "Introduction," in *Luke*, 31; O'Toole, "Luke's Treatment of Jews," 533.

[197] O'Toole, "Luke's Treatment of Jews," 537; Blajer, "Pounds or Talents," 279, 286.

Turning to the more immediate literary context, this parable serves as the capstone to the theme of Kingdom citizenship Luke begins developing in 17:20.[198] As Jesus nears Samaria (about half-way to Jerusalem from Galilee; 17:11), he shifts from teaching on right *responses* to the imminence of the Kingdom (17:1-19) to how Jesus' followers should *expect* the Kingdom to manifest and what it means to sit under Christ's rule (17:20-19:27).[199] In contrast to the ancient methodologies of predicting the end times, Jesus first clarifies that God's reign will not be precipitated by signs and wonders (17:20) but will arrive suddenly amongst his people (17:21-37).[200] Commentators disagree as to the exact meaning of the Kingdom being "in your midst" (ἐντὸς ὑμῶν; v. 21), but traditional interpretation understands this verse as depicting the coming Kingdom as an "inner spiritual reality and not a future apocalyptic transformation."[201] In other words, this entire section (17:20-19:27) begins with the statement that the Kingdom will not initially come as other earthly kingdoms, but as a spiritual reign amongst those devoted to the King.

Chapter eighteen then gives a series of teachings on what is required to enter this Kingdom,[202] the first of which teaches on the necessity of persistent prayer during times of

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[198] Carroll, "Luke 9:51-19:27 Ministry Continues as Jesus Journeys to Jerusalem: 19:1-10: Salvation Comes to the House of a Chief Tax Collector," 372-373; Garland, "Chapter 58: Luke 19:1-10," in *Luke,* 773; Arthur A. Just, Jr. and Thomas C. Oden, eds., "Zacchaeus, the Chief Tax Collector: Luke 19:1-10," in *Luke,* Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 3:442, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[199] John Nolland, "Who Will Be Ready When the Son of Man Comes? (17:20-18:8): When Will the Kingdom of God Come? (17:20-21)," in *Luke 9:21-18:34*, eds. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, Ralph P. Martin, and Lynn Allan Losie, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993) 35B:641 of 1114, Hoopla Digital Ebooks.

[200] Nolland, "When Will the Kingdom of God Come?" 35B:640 of 1114.

[201] Ibid.

[202] Nolland, "Entering the Kingdom like a Child (18:9-30): Entering the Kingdom of God like a Child (18:15-17)," 35B:679 of 1114.

difficulty, knowing that the Son of Man will eventually return to execute justice on the unrighteous (18:1-7).[203] However, the parable ends wondering whether those who endure such difficulty will persevere in their faith to see the Son of Man on the final day (18:8).[204] Thus, God will assuredly deliver on his promise of justice, but the bigger question concerns who will remain faithful to the King in awaiting this deliverance. Not only does Kingdom participation require perseverance, as indicated with this first parable, but parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector illustrates the necessity of humility and confession (as opposed to pride and self-sufficiency) to enter the Kingdom (18:9-14). Further, one can only take part in the Kingdom by adopting a childlike attitude of complete submission and dependence on God (18:15-17). Finally, there must be a willingness to give up *everything* for the King to demonstrate one's loyalty to Christ rather than the world (18:18-30). The chapter then concludes with the blind man who acknowledges Jesus as the divine, royal Messiah-King ("Jesus, Son of David;" v. 38), and Jesus answers the man's persistent seeking after him with a healing miracle (18:35-43).[205] Chapter nineteen then opens with the account of Zaccheus (19:1-10) who somewhat serves as the prototypical citizen of Christ's Kingdom up to this point in Jesus' Kingdom teachings: he unashamedly seeks out Jesus (19:3-4, 6; cf. 18:15-17); he gladly repents and desires to make right his wrongs (19:8b; cf. 18:9-14); and he willingly gives up his possessions for the King (19:8a; cf. 18:18-30). Jesus tells Zaccheus that salvation has come to his house "today," and since salvation mirrors entrance into the Kingdom, the Zaccheus narrative ends with an affirmation of the tax collector's acceptance

[203] Nolland, "Who Will Be Ready When the Son of Man Comes? (17:20-18:8): Speedy Vindication for Any Who Have Faith (18:1-8)," 35B:661 of 1114.

[204] Ibid.

[205] Nolland, "Reaching the City of Destiny (18:35-19:46): Jesus, Son of David Have Mercy on Me! (18:35-43)," 35C:191 of 948.

by the King (19:9-10). It is this encounter with Zaccheus that sets up the parable of the minas (19:11-27) where the themes of divine royalty and Kingdom acceptance come to a head right before Jesus finally arrives in the city (19:28), is met with the people's joyful celebration (19:29-38), is rebuked by the Pharisees (19:39), and weeps over Jerusalem for her inevitable rejection of her Messiah (19:41-44).

Exegesis

With these contextual elements framing the parable, the exegesis below will demonstrate that the primary teachings derived from this parable involve the Jews' rejection of Jesus and, more prominently, that gaining a place in the Kingdom (in addition to perseverance, humility, repentance, etc.; see Literary Context) requires actively living out one's faithful devotion to the King in obedience to him. Such focused concerns severely dilute the significance of the different rewards between the two faithful servants and ultimately relegates this detail on the far outskirts of the parable's main lessons.

A Hated Soon-to-Be-King Administers a Test (Vv. 11-15)

> Now while they were listening to these things, Jesus went on to tell a parable, because He was near Jerusalem and they thought the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately. So He said, "A nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then to return. And he called ten of his own slaves and gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business with this money until I come back.' But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.' When he returned after receiving the kingdom, he ordered that these slaves, to whom he had given the money, be summoned to him so that he would learn how much they had made by the business they had done."

Luke transitions to this pericope (v. 11) by connecting it with the Zaccheus encounter (19:1-10), depicting Jesus as telling this parable soon after he affirmed that the tax collector's salvation had come that very day (19:9). Afterwards, Jesus and his followers resume the march through Jericho and onto Jerusalem (19:1, 28), and many apparently came to believe that his

entrance into the Holy City would officially inaugurate the full-scale, corporeal Messianic Kingdom (v. 11).[206] Such a conclusion almost certainly arose from Jesus' recent teachings regarding the imminent reality of the Kingdom (17:20-21; 18:31, 19:9), their failure to understand the necessity of Jesus' coming death (18:32-34), and the eschatological hopes of Passover and Jerusalem (see Historical-Cultural Context).[207] In other words, rather than adequately capturing the 'already-but-not-yet' nature of the Kingdom, they simply saw it as 'already.' The phrase "was going to appear" (ἀναφαίνεσθαι, from ἀναφαίνω) clarifies the followers' mindset with its declarative connotation: the followers believed that the Kingdom was indeed present, as they had been taught (17:20-21), but it would be *declared* (i.e., made official and apparent) with the arrival in Jerusalem, but Jesus teaches here that the Kingdom would not be 'declared' until his second coming.[208] Therefore, Luke contextualizes this parable as intending to (1) to dispel these immediate expectations and present the manifestation of the Messianic Kingdom as entirely different from any earthly kingdom (cf. 17:20-25)[209] and (2) to reiterate to Jesus' followers of the interim period between this entrance into Jerusalem and Jesus' future return as King.[210]

Verse twelve initiates the first of two storylines within this parable, with verses 12, 14, and 27 comprising the allegory of a despised nobleman who left to gain his kingship and returns

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[206] Religious literature from the Second Temple period (e.g., the Psalms of Solomon 17:28-18:6 and 1 Enoch 91:11-17) indicates that the Jews of Jesus' time expected the Messiah to come as a powerful political figure that would destroy Israel's enemies and reign supreme over all nations from Jerusalem; T. Francis Glasson, "The Temporary Messianic Kingdom and the Kingdom of God," *The Journal of Theological Studies*, New Series, 41, no. 2 (October 1990): 517-518, 522, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23965593.

[207] Blajer, "Pounds or Talents," 282; Nolland, "Kingly Power," 35C:200 of 948.

[208] Blajer, "Pounds or Talents," 283.

[209] Garland, "Chapter 59: Luke 19:11-28," in *Luke*, 788-789.

[210] Garland, "Chapter 59: Luke 19:11-28," in *Luke*, 788.

as a king who squashes his opponents.[211] Despite Jesus not using the introductory refrain, "For the kingdom is like …" (cf. Matt. 25:14), the notion of a man leaving to "receive a kingdom for himself, and then to return" obviously alludes to Jesus' later ascension into heaven and his promised return to earth as King.[212] Even though these first hearers did not have the hindsight of Jesus' death, resurrection, ascension, and future second coming, this statement at least communicates that the Kingdom will not appear as expected.[213] This premise of a king's leaving and later returning corrects the expectation of an end-stage, eschatological Kingdom arising upon entering Jerusalem. Because the king's brief absence is *assumed* for the plot and not *taught* as the parable's principle,[214] Luke's previous contextualization (v. 11) comes into question. However, as the exegesis below will show, Jesus likely sought to teach the *significance* of rightly understanding how the Kingdom will appear among them: only those who actively demonstrate their devotion to the King will be granted a place in his Kingdom upon his return.

The second storyline of stewardship commences in verse thirteen, as the nobleman summons ten of his slaves to a test of faithfulness in his absence. Each servant receives a mina (a

[211] As mentioned above (see Historical-Context), most scholars recognize this hated-kingship allegory as an allusion to Archelaus, King Herod of Judea's son who faced an intense Jewish opposition to his claiming of his father's throne. The difficult comparison of Archelaus to Jesus will be dealt with in more detail below.

[212] Bovon, "Parable of the Minas," 612.

[213] Despite the vast majority of scholars recognizing this as an allegory to Jesus, some reject this conclusion on the basis of various details here, such as the adjective of "noble" (εὐγενὴς) that specifically referred to high-born Roman men (whereas Jesus was lowly born in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:1), Jesus was born as the Messiah-King and did not have to go "receive" it himself, and Jesus' joyful (not hated; cf. v. 14) reception in Jerusalem during the Triumphal Entry (Luke 19:28-38) (e.g., Garland, "Luke 19:11-28," in *Luke*, 789); however, reading the allegory as anything other than Christological is difficult considering the remainder of the parable; Blajer, "Pounds or Talents," 284.

[214] Marshall, "Parable of the Pounds," 814 of 1095.

few months' wages[215]) and is instructed to "do business" (i.e., trade and make a profit on[216]) with their mina while the nobleman is away. In contrast to Matthew's version of this parable, the Lukan slaves receive an equal amount of seed money (regardless of their abilities; cf. Matt. 25:15) and subsequently begin on the same playing field, making their later differing profits (vv. 16-20) that much more drastic. Whereas the man in the Matthean version entrusts to his servants presumably all of his life's savings (eight talents' worth; Matt. 25:15), the Lukan nobleman only distributes a relatively small sum of his wealth (approximately thirty months' wages),[217] designating the assignment as a test for the servants.[218] At first glance, it appears as if the nobleman desires to test his slaves' competency, but later verses will clarify the test as revealing the servants' loyalty and obedience to their master as they await his return (see the exegesis of verses 20-26).

Jesus switches back to the hated-kingship allegory in verse fourteen to lend more detail about this despised nobleman. During this time, the Roman Empire ruled the Jews' homeland (and surrounding countries) by way of local governors or kings, and for someone to gain that local governorship, he had to travel to Rome and be confirmed by the Roman government.[219] The "delegation" spoken of here in verse fourteen refers to a group of rebels that would oppose a future king's confirmation;[220] therefore, in this allegory, a representative group of citizens were

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[215] Marshall, "Parable of the Pounds," 815-816 of 1095; Bovon, "Parable of the Minas," 608; Schreiner, "Luke 19:11-27," in *Matthew – Luke*, 8:1392.

[216] Blajer, "Pounds or Talents," 284.

[217] A singular mina was only about one-sixtieth of a talent (cf. Matt. 25:15); Garland, "Luke 19:11-28," in *Luke*, 790.

[218] Marshall, "Parable of the Pounds," 816 of 1095.

[219] Bovon, "Parable of the Minas," 609, 612.

[220] Garland, "Luke 19:11-28," in *Luke*, 790.

sent to challenge the nobleman's kingship out of hatred. As discussed under Historical-Cultural Context, this allegorical plotline of a rejected king very likely refers to Archelaus, as the Jews similarly formed a delegation to fight against Archelaus' confirmation.[221] Without this historical framework, interpreters would be left severely confused as to the delegation's allegorical meaning;[222] however, the familiar account of Archelaus establishes the Jews as the "delegation." In other words, the question does not concern the metaphorical intent behind the delegation, but rather exposes the soon-to-be-king's (Jesus') enemies as the Jews who are (and will continue) rejecting him as Messiah.[223] This conclusion conforms with the recurring theme of Jewish animosity that has been building throughout Luke's gospel (see Literary Context), and the statement, "We do not want this man to reign over us," makes this connection all the more explicit (cf. Rom. 9-11). This rejected-kingship allegory comes back to the forefront only at the pericope's conclusion (v. 27), and the next twelve verses solely concern responsible stewardship.[224] Jesus does not give any narration of the servants' work (cf. Matt 25:16-18) and instead cuts straight to their accounting to the king—the main focus of the parable.[225] Immediately upon the nobleman's (now king's) return, he calls forward the slaves entrusted with his minas (v. 15), clearly representing the exhaustive account all must give Christ when he comes again in full glory as King (Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10). Under this eschatological context,

[221] Nolland, "Kingly Power," 35C:201 of 948.

[222] E.g., Garland, "Luke 19:11-28," in *Luke*, 790.

[223] Marshall, "Parable of the Pounds," 816 of 1095; Bovon, "Parable of the Minas," 609, 614.

[224] These next twelve verses are nearly identical to the parallel verses in Matthew's account (Matt. 25:19-29).

[225] Bovon, "Parable of the Minas," 605.

the mina given to each slave (v. 13) almost certainly represents how one enters the Kingdom: genuine faith in Christ as demonstrated by obedience and loyalty to the King.

The Profitable Servants (Vv. 16-19)

> The first slave appeared, saying, "Master, your minas has made ten minas more." And he said to him, "Well done, good slave; since you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to have authority over ten cities." The second one came, saying, "Your mina, master, has made five minas." And he said to him also, "And you are to be over five cities."

The reports of the first two servants, both coming with substantial increases on their mina and being proportionally compensated, constitute the primary factor of this parable utilized in the discussion around heavenly rewards. The first slave transformed his singular mina into ten minas—a thousand percent increase—and the king granted him ten cities in the new kingdom (vv. 16-17); similarly, the second slave earns five minas on his one and is given five cities (vv. 18-19). While this sentiment initially reads as a clear allusion to added heavenly rewards according to the Christian servant's 'profitability,' several details push back on such a black and white conclusion. Firstly, it must be recognized that the proportional reward of cities corresponds to the parable's overall politically toned theme of kingship[226] and is likely no more than an "allegorizing element," (a necessary part of the story that makes it parabolic).[227] In other words, the entire parable revolves around a new king organizing his kingdom, and so the awarding of cities simply serves as a peripheral detail that makes the allegorical picture consistent. Additionally note that the king awards the cities *not* because of the profit, but because of the *principles* of faithfulness and obedience that underlie the profit. The king himself explains that he gave the cities *not* because of the huge financial return on investment but rather because of his

[226] Marshall, "Parable of the Pounds," 817 of 1095; Blajer, "Pounds or Talents," 288; Bovon, "Parable of the Minas," 608.

[227] Nolland, "Kingly Power," 35C:201 of 948.

servants' "faithful[ness] in a very little thing" (v. 17). In essence, these two servants passed the test of faithfulness and demonstrated their loyalty to their master by obeying his command, and because they proved their allegiance, the king now allows them to rule alongside him.[228]

The *proportionality* of this reward (ten cities for ten minas; five cities for five minas), however, lies at the heart of this discussion.[229] If five minas illustrate a great faithfulness and ten minas an even greater faithfulness, then does not this parable clearly teach differing Kingdom rewards for differing levels of faith? An affirmative answer to this question is undeniably plausible, but the intended metaphor behind these gifted cities encourages a more obscure response. As explained above, the cities themselves stand as an allegorical device that harmonizes the parable into a coherent lesson, but just as faithfulness stands as the principle behind the minas, *Kingdom participation* stands as the principle behind the cities.[230] The reward, then, would be a heftier assignment and more responsibility within the Kingdom[231]—not some tangible prize given to the more lucrative. Consequently, the proportionality (greater authority for greater faithfulness) could very well point to a similar eschatological reality wherein believers contain differing spheres of authority based on the fidelity demonstrated during their earthly lives; after all, several verses convey that believers will rule alongside Christ in the Messianic Kingdom and serve as coregents with him (e.g., 1 Cor. 6:1-3, 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 5:10,

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[228] Blajer, "Pounds or Talents," 287.

[229] The second servant does not receive the same extended praise of the first servant (vv. 17, 19), but this does not indicate the king's lesser satisfaction with the second servant; most commentators agree that the same praise of the first servant is assumed here, as indicated by Καὶ ("Also,"); Blajer, "Pounds or Talents," 287; Nolland, "Kingly Power," 35C:201 of 948; Taylor, "Chapter 8: The New Covenant Blessing," in *Federal View of Glorification,* 181 of 299.

[230] Bovon, "Parable of the Minas," 614.

[231] Ibid.

20:4-6).[232] The wildly disproportionate award of several *cities* for mere minas would also coincide with the King's generous character (cf. Matt. 7:7-11; Rom. 8:32; 1 Tim. 6:17); any and all rewards will far outweigh what is deserved.[233]

This conclusion that verses 16-19 *do* teach varying heavenly rewards, however, is far from certain, as not every detail of a parable has an allegorical meaning,[234] none of the verses on believers reigning with Christ mention anything about differing authorial positions within the Kingdom,[235] and the parable generally intends to contrast the faithful servants who will rule alongside their king (vv. 16-19) with those who prove themselves faithless (vv. 20-24)—not draw stark distinctions among those devoted to the king.[236] Further, the teachings leading up to this parable (17:20-19:10) center around citizenship and acceptance into God's Kingdom (see Literary Context). Such a framework contextualizes the parable as delineating these faithful servants as among those accepted and given a place in the Kingdom due to their loyalty and obedience (just like the repentant tax collector, the blind man, and Zaccheus; see Literary Context). This character of the unprofitable servant then comes as the climax of the entire parable and further elucidates how readers are to understand the role of the two faithful servants.

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[232] Bovon, "Parable of the Minas," 614

[233] Garland, "Luke 19:11-28," in *Luke*, 790; Schreiner, "Luke 19:11-27," in *Matthew – Luke*, 8:1392-1393.

[234] Marshall, "Parable of the Pounds," 818 of 1095; Schreiner, "Luke 19:11-27," in *Matthew – Luke*, 8:1393; Blomberg, "Degrees of Reward?" 168; Klyne R. Snodgrass, "Parables of Future Eschatology," in *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, Second ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 571, Adobe Digital Editions.

[235] Verses stating that believers will co-rule with Christ do not speak of this coregency in personalized terms specific to each believer; rather, the *collective* Church will reign with Christ. Note the collective terminology used in several passages ("the saints," "heirs of God," the plural pronouns of "we," "you," and "they," etc.), such as Daniel 7:27, Luke 22:28-30, Romans 8:17, 1 Corinthians 6:1-3, 2 Tim. 2:12, and Revelation 5:10, 20:4-6. None of these verses depict differing positions of authority based on the extent of obedience, but that does not negate the possibility of such a hierarchy; rather, it is difficult to pull this idea from Scripture outside of Luke's parable of the minas.

[236] Blajer, "Pounds or Talents," 287.

The Unprofitable Servant (Vv. 20-23)

> And then another came, saying, "Master, here is your mina, which I kept tucked away in a handkerchief; for I was afraid of you, because you are a demanding man; you take up what you did not lay down, and reap what you did not sow." He said to him, "From your own lips I will judge you, you worthless slave. Did you know that I am a demanding man, taking up what I did not lay down, and reaping what I did not sow? And so why did you not put my money in the bank, and when I came back, I would have collected it with interest?"

A third servant now appears before his king with nothing but the measly mina originally entrusted to him long ago (v. 13), and the parable now slows down to examine the motivations behind the unprofitable servant. Whereas the faithful servants receive the designations of "the first slave," and "the second slave," Jesus does not continue this numerical sequence with this servant; rather, Jesus describes him as "another" (v. 20).[237] The Greek adjective behind this translation (ὁ ἕτερος) connotes this servant as representative of a *kind* of slave—one entirely different and separate from the first two.[238] Such a break in pattern demonstrates that the central contrast here is *not* between the two faithful servants but between the faithful servants and the unfaithful servant; the first and second slaves comprise one category (obedient), whereas the third represents the other (disobedient). Opposed to the first two servants who evidently heeded the king's instructions to "do business" (v. 13), this third one decided to hide away his mina in his σουδάριον ("handkerchief"), a protective scarf worn around the head and neck to ward off the sun.[239] Mishnaic law saw the hiding away of money as a valuable way of securing it from being stolen, but the specific practice of hiding delegated money away in a napkin or

[237] The subtleties underlying ὁ ἕτερος ("another") are difficult to fully replicate in English, but the vast majority of major English translations do translate this phrase as "another," (e.g., NASB, ESV, HCSB, NKJV, NET, NIV, RSV).

[238] Marshall, "Parable of the Pounds," 818 of 1095.

[239] Marshall, "Parable of the Pounds," 818 of 1095; Nolland, "Kingly Power," 35C:202 of 948.

handkerchief was largely perceived as the stereotypical picture of irresponsible money management.[240] Under this situation, the master would hold the servant responsible for any losses and expect him to restore the financial damages for such carelessness.[241] Therefore, with this understanding, this slave completely disregarded his master's charge to increase the mina *and* he proved himself to be characteristically untrustworthy and lackadaisical.[242] This unfaithful servant, in contrast to his faithful counterparts immediately begins trying to justify his irresponsibility, suggesting the servant's innate knowledge that his recklessness would not be received well.

The third slave explains his idleness with two points: (1) fear of the king's "demanding" character, and (2) the king's supposedly exploitative business dealings (v. 21). First, the servant argues that he so feared the king's reaction to potentially losing his mina by "doing business" and risking the money that he stowed it away.[243] This adjective behind "demanding" (αὐστηρὸς) comes from a verb meaning "to dry up, wither," and thus conveys the king as a "tough, uncompromising, punctilious financier."[244] Interestingly, the servant then switches to a completely different, but likely more truthful, explanation. This second half of the justification accuses the king of taking advantage of others to increase his wealth; to "take up what you did not lay down," constituted a particularly serious crime in Jewish tradition.[245] In essence, this servant saw the king as a severe, exploitative, and predatory businessman who should not profit

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[240] Marshall, "Parable of the Pounds," 818 of 1095; Garland, "Luke 19:11-28," in *Luke*, 791.

[241] Garland, "Luke 19:11-28," in *Luke*, 791.

[242] Blajer, "Pounds or Talents," 288.

[243] Blajer, "Pounds or Talents," 288-289; Marshall, "Parable of the Pounds," 818 of 1095; Carroll, "Approach to Jerusalem," 380.

[244] Garland, "Luke 19:11-28," in *Luke*, 791.

[245] Garland, "Luke 19:11-28," in *Luke*, 791.

from work he did not do;[246] in opposition to his reign and his inflating wealth built on the backs of others, the third servant decided to defy the then-nobleman's previous command.[247] The third servant evidently believes himself to be in the right, that obstructing this king's attempts at even more undeserved wealth was innately morally correct.[248]

The king does not explicitly confirm nor deny this characterization, but for the sake of argument, he entertains the hypothetical possibility that such a characterization (and, therefore, the servant's justification for doing nothing) is true and vows to judge the servant on that assumption (v. 23), with the phrase "from your own lips I will judge you," referring back to the servant's explanation given in the previous verse. Further, English translations almost always render the Greek question format "ᾔδεις ὅτι …" as "Did you know …?" or "You knew …" (e.g., NASB, ESV, LEB, NET, NIV, NKJV, RSV) when it could equally be read as a conditional question: "If you knew … why did you not?" (vv. 23-24).[249] Thus, the king's response is effectively, "If I am, in fact, demanding and exploitative, then why did you not put the mina in the bank to at least earn interest?" To place the mina with bankers to passively earn interest would have been the simplest and most obvious solution to the servant's predicament: putting the mina in the bank would have involved the least amount of risk and effort, and he would have earned a minimal profit to avoid the king's anger while not earning him that much more

[246] Marshall, "Parable of the Pounds," 818 of 1095.

[247] Ibid.; Nolland, "Kingly Power," 35C:202 of 948; Garland, "Luke 19:11-28," in *Luke*, 791.

[248] Bovon, "Parable of the Minas," 615.

[249] The CSB and the NLT render these verses in this conditional format; Marshall, "Parable of the Pounds," 818-819 of 1095.

wealth.[250] In other words, the king calls out the slave for an inconsistent explanation, arguing that if the servant *actually* believed the king was demanding and exploitative (v. 21) then putting the mina in the bank would have been the plain course of action, and since the servant instead hid the money away in a handkerchief (v. 20), the king is heavily implying this slave's facetiousness and disloyalty.[251] In doing so, this third servant disqualifies himself from gaining a place in the new kingdom alongside his fellow servants (cf. vv. 17, 19), and he now makes himself vulnerable to the king's anger as an enemy. Because this slave revealed his own hatred for the king (cf. vv. 14, 21) and demonstrated his faithlessness by defying the king's instruction (vv. 20-21), this servant forfeits participating in the new kingdom and is ultimately marked as an opponent to the throne.

Additionally, the parable's overarching dichotomy between the obedient and the rebellious becomes that much sharper under this royal motif; there are those (like the first two servants) who submit to the king and subsequently reign with him (vv. 16-19), and there are those (like the citizens and the third servant) who reject his reign and are subject to judgement (vv. 12, 14, 20-21, 27).[252] Interestingly, the core character of this unfaithful servant arguably comes as the third iteration of the same anti-Kingdom archetype Luke has emphasized in this entire section on the Kingdom starting in 17:20. The proud Pharisee (18:9-17), the rich young ruler (18:18-30), and the unfaithful servant (19:20-21) all justify their Kingdom participation based on their supposed moral (and, therefore, spiritual) superiority, but such pride bars them

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[250] Marshall, "Parable of the Pounds," 819 of 1095; Nolland, "Kingly Power," 35C:200, 202 of 948; Garland, "Luke 19:11-28," in *Luke*, 791; Blajer, "Pounds or Talents," 289; Schreiner, "Luke 19:11-27," in *Matthew – Luke*, 8:1393.

[251] Bovon, "Parable of the Minas," 615.

[252] Taylor, "New Covenant Blessing," in *Federal View of Glorification*, 181 of 299.

from entering a kingdom comprised only of those repentant (cf. 18:9-14; 19:8b), humble (cf. 18:15-17; 19:3-4), and devoted to the King (cf. 18:18-30; 19:6, 8a). Thus, this parable weaves together the recent teachings on what is required for entry into the Kingdom by starkly contrasting the faith*ful* who actively obey the King with the faith*less* who actively defy his reign.

However, the question surrounding the accuracy of the servant's characterization of the king remains—is this Christ-representing king actually strict, harsh, and unscrupulous as "demanding" (αὐστηρὸς) and "you take up what you did not lay down, and reap what you did not sow" imply (v. 21)? To be sure, the unfaithful slave's description, that the king is fear-inducing, severe, and exploitative, perfectly depicts the tyrannical reign of Archelaus alluded to throughout this parable (see Historical Context and the exegesis of verses 12 and 14), but how could this also point to Jesus? Firstly, as Bovon points out, strictness does not equate to unfairness;[253] several NT Scriptures depict God as fiercely just and uncompromising in administering unbiased judgement (e.g., Rom. 1:18, 11:21-22; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 20:12-15).[254] The idea of Christ as "demanding," therefore, finds support throughout the NT, especially for those opposed to his reign (as represented by the last servant). Secondly, the king's extreme generosity expressed towards the two faithful servants (several *cities* for a couple years' wages; vv. 17, 19) directly contradicts the latter depiction of a greedy and corrupt king (v. 21b).[255] The resulting picture of a king who spoils those loyal to him far beyond what is deserved *but* simultaneously doles out harsh judgement to the defiant fits perfectly with a God who abounds in mercy, gifts,

[253] Bovon, "Parable of the Minas," 615.

[254] Schreiner, "Luke 19:11-27," in *Matthew – Luke*, 8:1393.

[255] Ibid.; Nolland, "Kingly Power," 35C:202 of 948; Garland, "Luke 19:11-28," in *Luke*, 790; Blajer, "Pounds or Talents," 289.

and grace for his people but delivers unswerving justice to the spiritually rebellious. The parable's concluding verses (vv. 24-27) go on to clearly articulate this principle.

Rejected Kingship and Faithful Stewardship (Vv. 24-27)

> And then he said to the other slaves who were present, "Take the mina away from him and give it to the one who has the ten minas." And they said to him, "Master, he already has ten minas." "I tell you that to everyone who has, more shall be given, but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. But as for these enemies of mine who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them in my presence."

The king implicitly rejects this apology (v. 21) with the rhetorical questioning of his slave's inconsistent actions (vv. 22-23), but he now makes his rejection of this slave obvious by climactically transferring the unused mina to the first faithful servant (v. 24) and ultimately demonstrating the parable's primary principle (v. 26). Notice that the king does not take the mina back *for himself* (again contradicting the unfaithful slave's accusation of the king's greed in v. 21b) but entrusts the money to one who has already proved himself trustworthy and loyal to his king,[256] presumably under the assumption that the faithful servant would steward the mina similarly well (vv. 16-17). The onlookers then speak for the hearers of this parable by objecting to this already-wealthy and already-rewarded servant receiving even more wealth and more reward (v. 25). In doing so, the parable exposes the hearer's legalistic bias; earning five minas to gain five cities and ten minas for ten cities establishes proportionality and fairness, but the giving of a now-infinitesimal (compared to the wealth of ten cities),[257] seemingly unearned 'bonus' to the most profitable now goes against this premise of merit.[258] However, each slave's relatively small seed money (v. 13) and the king's response to the two faithful servants (v. 17) indicate that

[256] Marshall, "Parable of the Pounds," 819 of 1095; Blajer, "Pounds or Talents," 290.

[257] Nolland, "Kingly Power," 35C:202 of 948.

[258] Marshall, "Parable of the Pounds," 819-820 of 1095.

this assignment was never a business venture to increase the then-nobleman's wealth but a test of faithfulness to determine which of his servants could be trusted to rule with him as king (see exegesis of v. 13). This giving of the extra mina to the first faithful servant, therefore, subverts this expectation of a fair kingdom and redraws the king as reigning with much more polarization: those faithful to him will receive far more than what is deserved—that is, a *position* within the Kingdom—but those opposing him will receive a severe, but just, loss—that is, a chance at even *entering* the Kingdom. Because the transferal of the mina illustrates this principle (v. 26), the extra mina itself should not be allegorized beyond depicting the parable's main point.[259]

Jesus then exits the third-person narration of this parable to explicitly address those listening on how this principle parallels the coming Kingdom (v. 26):[260] those following Jesus must rightly anticipate this unearthly, already-but-not-yet manifestation the Kingdom (cf. v. 11) in order to actively demonstrate their faithful loyalty to Christ and be rewarded beyond merit, lest they be found faithless when held to account on the final day and have *everything* taken away.[261] The defiant third servant clearly serves as the parable's main focus, warning against Jesus' followers similarly defying his reign by refusing to heed his instruction. More specifically, the parable seeks to contrast the first faithful servant, who obeyed the king out of devotion and was rewarded far beyond what was deserved plus some, and the rebellious servant, who now has nothing and is labeled an enemy. The difference in reward between the two faithful servants (vv.

[259] Marshall, "Parable of the Pounds," 819-820 of 1095; Blomberg, "Degrees of Reward?" 168.

[260] Marshall, "Parable of the Pounds," 820 of 1095; Nolland, "Kingly Power," 35C:202-203 of 948; Carroll, "Approach to Jerusalem," 380.

[261] Marshall, "Parable of the Pounds," 820 of 1095; Blajer, "Pounds or Talents," 292; Schreiner, "Luke 19:11-27," in *Matthew – Luke*, 8:1393.

16-19) stands entirely peripheral to the parable's principle[262] and arguably exists only to set up the expectation of fairness that the king intentionally overturns in verse twenty-four (see above). Regardless, the stewardship storyline (vv. 13, 15-26) clearly does not intend to create a hierarchy of authority amongst believers in the future Kingdom, but rather contrast the faithful with the unfaithful[263]—the King's co-rulers from the King's adversaries.[264] This conforms with the previous statement that his faithful followers will "receive many times as much at this time, and in the age to come, *eternal life*" (18:29-30)[265]—eternal life with Christ in his Kingdom, just like the extra mina, is the most undeserved reward any could receive, but it will not be given without actively living out one's faith, proving oneself trustworthy and unflinchingly loyal to the King in anticipating his return.

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[262] It should also be noted that a related concept arises in Matthew 13:23 (Mark 4:20; Luke 8:15) where the sowing of the Word on good soil may produce varying amounts of fruit, "some a hundred, some sixty, and some thirty times as much" (Matt. 13:8, 23). Similar to Luke's parable of the minas, the parable of the sower does not emphasize these distinctions between those with receptive soil but rather focuses between the fruit*ful* and the fruit*less* (Matt. 13:1-9, 18-23). This can be observed in Jesus' explanation of the parable (Matt. 13:18-23) as he does not even touch on the allegorical meaning (if there is one) behind the varying yields of crop for those receptive to the Word, implying that the distinctions here, too, are peripheral. Paul draws a similar agricultural metaphor in 1 Corinthian 3:5-9 but interestingly emphasizes that all Kingdom growth comes from God alone (see Literary Context in Works Tested by Fire: 1 Corinthians 10-15), which could very well speak to the variations in growth here in the parable of the sower. As Bruner explains, "Not all would be equally fruitful, though all may be equally receptive … The differing yields are expressed but unexplained, as if to say, 'how much' is God's business" (Frederick Dale Bruner, "Chapter 13: The Sermon of Parables: I. The Doctrine of the Kingdom of God: A. The Interpretation of the Parable of the Sower, 13:18-23." in *Matthew: A Commentary*, Revised and Expanded ed. [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004], 2: The Churchbook: Matthew 13-28:xlviii, ProQuest Ebook Central).

[263] This is a near-universal consensus amongst commentators (e.g., Marshall, "Parable of the Pounds," 820 of 1095; Snodgrass, "Future Eschatology," 571; Bovon, "Parable of the Minas," 606; Blomberg, "Degrees of Reward?" 168).

[264] Some commentators do make such a conclusion, such as Wilkin who surmises the parable as distinguishing four different types of people in the relation to the Kingdom: the exceptionally faithful (the first servant), the "halfheartedly" faithful (the second servant), the just barely saved (the third servant), and the unbelievers (the king's opponents); Wilkin, "Christians Will Be Judged According to Their Works at the Rewards Judgement," 28-31.

[265] Blajer, "Pounds or Talents," 292.

The parable concludes by returning to the narrative of a rejected king as he orders the public execution of his opponents who "did not want [him] to reign over them," (v. 27; cf. vv. 12, 14). Based on the king's rejection of the third servant (vv. 20-25), the "enemies" spoken of here likely refer to the citizens who hated him (v. 14), the delegation sent to oppose his kingship (v. 14), and this unfaithful servant who demonstrated himself to be disloyal to the king (see the exegesis of vv. 22-25). Thus, the parable designates two groups of people in relation to the "king" (i.e., Christ): the faithful and obedient, and the rebellious and defiant (cf. Luke 11:23). Now, to modern readers, this image of a public execution appears harsh and cruel, but this practice of openly slaying a king's enemies, presumably with the intention to warn against further rebellions, was relatively common in the ancient world and would have been familiar to Jesus' original audience.[266] The underlying allusion to Archelaus within the hated kingship theme (see Historical-Cultural Context and the exegesis of verses 12 and 14) also comes through this concluding picture, as the Herodian kings notoriously executed those who opposed the throne.[267] However, now that this Archelaus-like rejected kingship allegory to the Messianic Kingdom has concluded, the outstanding concern of this comparison can now be adequately addressed: how can Jesus, who shows himself as incredibly kind, forgiving, and gracious[268] liken himself to the cruel, brutal, and tyrannical Archelaus?

This obvious question emerges from two clear observations that seem to contradict each other, namely that the king plainly represents Christ (see the exegesis of verses 13 and 15) yet simultaneously alludes to the reign of Archelaus (see Historical-Cultural Context).

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[266] Marshall, "Parable of the Pounds," 820-821 of 1095.

[267] Nolland, "Kingly Power," 35C:203 of 948.

[268] John 4:7-26; Acts 10:43; Rom. 5:20-21; Eph. 2:7, 1 Tim. 1:16, 1 John 1:9.

Understandably, many biblical scholars either outrightly reject or perform hermeneutical gymnastics (e.g., calling it an "allegorical slip"[269]) to get around this connection between Jesus and Archelaus,[270] but such a difficulty arises from fundamentally misunderstanding the aspect being compared. The parable does *not* portray Jesus as an Archelaus-like figure, but it rather draws the similarity between how the Jews adamantly rejected Archelaus and how the Jews *will* reject Jesus.[271] In other words, Jesus utilizes the historical referent to demonstrate that the Jews will attack Jesus' Kingship just as they did with Archelaus.[272] Further, just as this historically ruthless king did not tolerate opposition, neither will Christ when he returns in full majesty.[273] Within the context of Jesus and his followers approaching Jerusalem with eschatological expectations (see Historical-Cultural Context and the exegesis of v. 11) alongside the growing animosity between the Jewish authorities and Jesus (see Literary Context), this final image foreshadows the more immediate fate of the Jews who will reject their Messiah[274] *and*, more broadly, the fate of any and all who defy the reign of King Jesus.

Conclusion on Luke's Parable of the Minas

Those advocating for a works-based, differential reward system for believers in the eschaton will nearly always cite this parable in support, specifically pointing to the proportional

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[269] Bovon, "Parable of the Minas," 616.

[270] E.g., Carroll, "Approach to Jerusalem," 381; Garland, "Luke 19:11-28," in *Luke*, 784-785, 792.

[271] Snodgrass, "Future Eschatology," 568, 571; see Historical-Cultural Context regarding the Luke's portrayal of the growing Jewish opposition towards Jesus as he and his followers approached Jerusalem right before the Triumphal Entry.

[272] Snodgrass, "Future Eschatology," 571.

[273] John 5:27, 12:48; Acts 10:42, 17:31; Heb. 10:30-31; Rev. 20:12-15; Marshall, "Parable of the Pounds," 820-821 of 1095; Blomberg, "Common Exegetical Fallacies," 150:732; Schreiner, "Luke 19:11-27," in *Matthew – Luke*, 8:1393.

[274] Some even see allegorical public execution of the king's opponents (v. 27) as a foretelling of Jerusalem's destruction in 70 AD (e.g., Carroll, "Approach to Jerusalem," 381).

rewards of cities for the first and second faithful servants (vv. 16-19). This indeed may be true, but the exegesis above establishes that the difference between the two faithful servants is such a peripherally minute detail compared to the main principles of the parable. As Jesus and his followers approach Jerusalem for Passover with loaded eschatological expectations, Jesus tells the parable of the minas (1) to dissuade his followers from anticipating an immediate, corporeal Messianic Kingdom upon their arrival into Jerusalem and (2) to teach on the necessity of obedience and loyalty for Kingdom entrance in awaiting Christ's return as King. Those who validate their inward faith with outward responsible stewardship will be rewarded far beyond merit with a place in the Kingdom, but those who have nothing to show will be called out as faithless, have everything taken away, and be labeled an enemy of the King. These enemies of the King crop up on the fringes of the stewardship plotline and likely refer to the historically tyrannical reign of Archelaus over Judea. Jesus does not intend to liken his character to that of Archelaus, but the intensity of Archelaus' Jewish opposition and the severity of Archelaus' treatment of his opponents will parallel Jesus; just as the Jews adamantly rejected Archelaus' reign, they will also adamantly reject Jesus,[275] and just as Archelaus had no mercy for his enemies, neither will Jesus on the Day of Judgement.

However, the question remains: does this parable teach varying heavenly rewards for varying levels of faithfulness? This possibility cannot be denied, but the exegesis above extensively demonstrates that the proportional difference between the first and second servant is so obviously peripheral and not the parable's primary principle (those proving themselves faithful will gain and those proving themselves unfaithful will lose; v. 26) nor even the

[275] See Literary Context for how Luke has portrayed the growing hostility between the Jews and Jesus throughout his gospel.

secondary principle (the Jews will reject their Messiah-King; vv. 14, 27). Jesus told this parable to teach that entrance into the Kingdom requires an active expression of one's faith through obedience and loyalty to Christ in awaiting his return as King—*not* to teach of reward differences between believers. Further, it could be argued that the reward proportionality between the two faithful servants merely exists to establish fairness and merit early in the story so that the king's later overturning of this premise (and the parable's primary principle) is all the more surprising and literarily effective. Regardless, this detail comprises less than a fourth of the whole parable and is almost certainly not in significant focus.[276] Overall, while the different spheres of authority for the faithful servants potentially *does* allude to differential heavenly rewards, such an ancillary detail should not be heralded as the overarching lesson here, especially when the overwhelmingly predominant concerns of this parable include contrasting the faithful with the unfaithful in the context of Jesus' future Kingdom and warning Jesus' followers of the rising Jewish opposition to his reign.

[276] The two faithful servants take up four out of seventeen total verses (approximately 23.5 percent).

IV. The NT Motif of Believers' Crowns

This chapter addresses the NT motif of believers' "crowns" given at the eschaton. Several verses throughout the NT speak of believers receiving crowns (στέφανος)[277] when Christ returns, such as the "crown of righteousness" (2 Tim. 4:8) and the "crown of life" (Jas. 1:12, Rev. 2:10). Particularly prevalent in popular dispensational circles is the notion that every NT "crown" refers to different gifts awarded to those outstandingly remarkable in a specific area of the Christian life (e.g., the "imperishable crown" from 1 Cor. 9:25 given only to the exceptionally perseverant and/or disciplined).[278] Therefore, the believer ought to strive in earning each of these crowns, proving himself extraordinarily faithful.[279] Upon closer examination, this recurring motif of crowns refers to nothing more or less than salvation—eternal life—itself.

The Imperishable Crown (1 Cor. 9:24-26a)

> Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. So they do it to obtain a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way as not to run aimlessly…

The first sequential appearance of crown imagery comes in 1 Corinthians where Paul speaks of "one" gaining an "imperishable" wreath, and some have interpreted this as pertaining

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[277] It should be noted that English Bibles typically use the gloss "crown" for two different Greek words: στέφανος (the focus of this chapter) and διάδημα. The latter only occurs three times in the NT, all in the book of Revelation (12:3, 13:1, 19:12), and all in reference to the eschatological reign of either Christ (12:3; 19:12) or the antichrist (13:1). Abbott-Smith delineates διάδημα as specifically speaking of the stereotypical crown associated with royalty and nobility ("διάδημα," 106). In contrast, as will be discussed in this chapter, στέφανος refers to the crown or wreath given to triumphant soldiers, honored governors or citizens, or winning athletes to represent victory, valor, and perseverance (Abbott-Smith, "στέφανος," 418). Subsequently, it should be noted that the verses exegeted in this chapter do *not* refer to a crown of kingship and majesty (διάδημα) but rather use στέφανος—a wreath of glorious triumph.

[278] See, for example, GotQuestions' discussion on this topic ("What Are the Five Heavenly Crowns That Believers Can Receive in Heaven?" GotQuestions.org, last modified May 11, 2023, https://www.gotquestions.org/heavenly-crowns.html) and David Jeremiah's perspective ("What Kind of Rewards Will Believers Receive in Heaven?" David Jeremiah Blog, last modified April 10, 2023, https://davidjeremiah.blog/what-kind-of-rewards-will-believers-receive-in-heaven/).

[279] Cf. "Five Heavenly Crowns?" GotQuestions.org; "What Kind of Rewards?" David Jeremiah Blog.

to heavenly rewards added to salvation, that those especially perseverant and controlled will receive special recognition in the eschaton.[280] Various contextual elements, however, will establish this passage as demonstrating the necessity of focused perseverance in genuine faith; these verses do not contrast those coming in first versus second place, but rather those who finish the race versus those who "disqualify" themselves (9:27) by dropping out.[281]

These verses come in the middle of Paul's advice to the Corinthians on how to handle food sacrificed to idols (8:1-11:1).[282] The apostle begins this discussion by clarifying that love for God supersedes any "knowledge" the Corinthians may have regarding the controversy of eating such food (8:1-3). While Christ has won total freedom for the Corinthians, and they can rightfully partake in this food (8:4-8), they must be cautious doing so in front of those with less "knowledge," since this may embolden others to continue their food worship of idols (8:9-13). Simply put, Paul encourages the Corinthians to internalize and embrace their freedom in Christ, but they must *wisely* use these newfound rights so as not to incidentally cause others to sin. The apostle then demonstrates this principle by pointing to his own lawful right to be paid for his ministerial work (9:1-14), yet because the Lord has commanded Paul to preach the truth of Christ to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 9:1-18), Paul has not exercised this financial right for the sake of the gospel (9:15-18). While Paul himself is free under Christ, he leverages this freedom in a willing 'slavery' to evangelism, becoming "all things to all people" to bring as many as he can to Christ (9:19-22). The spiritual freedoms and rights Christ has won should not be taken as a license to

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[280] E.g., Swindoll, "Strengthening Family and Fellowship (1 Corinthians 7:1-10:33): Sacrificing Rights for Rewards (1 Corinthians 9:1-27)," 139; Taylor, "IV. Christian Freedom, the Priority of Love, and the Peril of Idolatry (8:1-11:1)," in *1 Corinthians*, 28:212-213.

[281] Blomberg, "Degrees of Reward?" 163.

[282] The city of Corinth at the time of Paul's writing was notorious for its religious pluralism and pagan influence; see Historical-Cultural Context under Chapter 2: Works Tested by Fire.

live a life carefree and careless of others; rather, Christians ought to wisely steward these freedoms by intentionally living "for the sake of the gospel" (9:23a) so they, like Paul, "might save some" (9:22).

However, Paul now begins looking at the complementary side of deliberate, gospel-centered living: not only would others see Christ's salvation in Paul's efforts, but it would simultaneously allow Paul to also "become a *fellow partaker* (συγκοινωνὸς)" in the gospel (9:23b). This ambiguous phrasing has lead translators and commentators to offer different renderings that attempt to fill in the interpretive gap,[283] but several elements point to a much simpler reading. The word's root (κοινός) has a base meaning of commonality,[284] the compounded prefix (συν-) connotes community and solidarity, [285] and the genitive format contains the idea of sharing and mutual benefit.[286] Thus, a more literal translation of verse 23b

[283] Some commentators see Paul as referring to the broader benefits of the gospel that he wants to "partake" in (e.g., Gordon D. Fee, "Text, Exposition, and Notes: III. In Response to the Corinthian Letter (7:1-16:12): B. Food Sacrificed to Idols (8:1-11:1): 2. Paul's Apostolic Defense (9:1-27): D. Paul's Apostolic Freedom (9:19-23)," in *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, eds. Ned B. Stonehouse, F. F. Bruce, Gordon D. Fee, and Joel B. Green, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 431-432, Internet Archive), in accordance with the CSB, ESV, NIV, and NLT translations ("share in its blessings"). Others understand it as Paul seeing himself as "partnering" *with* the gospel in hopes of saving others (e.g., Ciampa and Rosner, "Commentary on 1 Corinthians: IV. 'Flee Idolatry' and 'Glorify God' in Your Worship, 8:1-14:40: A. Condemnation of Idolatrous Practices: 'Flee Idolatry' (Food Offered to Idols), 8:1-11:1: 2. Exposition of Paul's Example: Waiving Rights for the Sake of the Gospel, 9:1-23: d. Paul Refuses to Exploit His Apostolic Status and Freedom, 9:19-23," 379-380). The dominant view, however, interprets this phrase as simply referring to Paul's desire of remaining perseverant unto salvation (e.g., Schreiner, "Commentary: 3. Answers to Contemporary Issues in the Church (7:1-16:4): C. Idol Food: Edification and Danger (8:1-11:1): ii. Paul's Example (9:1-27): d. The Rationale for Paul's Cultural Adaptation (9:19-23)," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:193; Ellis, "V. Liberty's Boundaries: Re Idol Food (8:1-11:1): B. On Paul's Apostolic Status and His Nonuse of Apostolic Rights (9:1-27)," 364-365), in accordance with the NKJV ("partaker"), NET ("participant"), and LEB ("participant") translations.

[284] Abbott-Smith, "κοινός," 250-251; Souter, "κοινός," 136

[285] Thiselton, "Commentary: IV. Response to Inquiries about Marriage and Related Issues and about Associations with Idols (7:1-11:1): B. Questions about Meat Associated with Idols and the Priority of Love over 'Right'' (8:1-11:1): 2. Second Part of Paul's Response: A Personal Example of Subordinating 'Rights' for the Good of the Whole (9:1-27): c. 'Everything for the Gospel': Paul's Own Strategy and Example in Sharper Focus (9:19-23)," 707.

[286] Ciampa and Rosner, "Apostolic Status and Freedom," 380.

would read "that I might jointly share in [the gospel]."[287] Further, the NT's three other uses of this verbal noun illustrate this same notion of communal oneness as Christ's ransomed people: in Philippians 1:7, Paul writes to the church in Philippi from a prison cell, identifying his audience as "partakers (συγκοινωνούς) of grace" with him as he sits imprisoned for the gospel; in Romans 11:17, Paul likens the grafting in of the Gentiles to God's redemptive story to a newly grown branch of an olive tree that "became partaker" (συγκοινωνὸς) of the same root as the other branches;[288] and in Revelation 1:9, John unifies himself to his readers by greeting them as their "brother and fellow participant (συγκοινωνὸς) in the tribulation and the kingdom." All these verses utilize συγκοινωνός to illustrate oneness and solidarity in salvation; therefore, here in 1 Corinthians 9:23, Paul's use of συγκοινωνός paints a picture of the apostle bonding himself to the Corinthians as *one body* in the gospel. Paul is not endeavoring to earn his righteousness, nor is he unsure of his salvation; rather, he calls the Corinthians to wisely steward their freedoms and constantly live "for the sake of the gospel" (v. 23b) as he has in his evangelism and preaching (vv. 3-23a), Paul envisions himself and his converts (including the Corinthians) as mutually benefited, *joint sharers* in Christ's victory.

Paul clarifies this idea in verses 24-27: living with this level of lifelong discipline and purpose for the Kingdom not only has obvious evangelistic impact, but it also engenders perseverance in the gospel to the very end. By spending his life singularly focused on his God-given mission, Paul will become increasingly disciplined in his spiritual endurance and secure

[287] Ciampa and Rosner, "Apostolic Status and Freedom," 380.

[288] Thiselton, "Paul's Own Strategy and Example," 707.

his own 'partaking' of the gospel (vv. 23b, 26-27)[289] while concurrently winning others into the Kingdom (vv. 19-22). This necessity of perseverance in living for the gospel's sake continues into chapter ten, but Paul now switches the focus from himself to his immediate audience. The Corinthians must emulate Paul in this mindset of cultivating self-discipline and spiritual tenacity; they must be extremely cautious and cognizant of their sin (10:12-22), lest they become caught up in it like the Israelites, come under judgement, and ultimately lose out on God's deliverance (10:1-11). Paul then returns to the specific topic of food and concludes that all things, including eating, should ultimately be done for the glory of God, with self-control and discernment, and without hindering the salvation of others (10:23-11:1).

With these literary contextual elements now elucidated, the verses in question (24-26a) may be examined and, more specifically, the exact nature of the "imperishable wreath" of verse 25 may be explored. Again, Paul is speaking from his own experience, but the context of a joint salvific victory with the Corinthians *and* the proceeding content regarding the necessity of persistence in faithfulness (chapter ten) points to these verses as a call for all believers, including the apostle himself, to jointly persevere towards their promised salvation by living "for the sake of the gospel" (v. 23b). Paul condenses this sentiment of collective spiritual victory into two adjacent athletic metaphors, first as a foot race (vv. 24-26a) then as a boxing match (vv. 26b-27). This first picture of a runner striving to win a race (comprising the key text here) likely refers to the Isthmian Games (a slightly lesser Olympic Games) held in Corinth every other year comprised of various sports competitions.[290] The Isthmian Games were a Corinthian cultural

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[289] Thomas R. Schreiner and Ardel B. Caneday, "3: The Race to Be Run: The Necessity of Obedient Faith," in *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance Assurance* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 113, Google Books.

[290] Schreiner, "Commentary: 3. Answers to Contemporary Issues in the Church (7:1-16:4): C. Idol Food: Edification and Danger (8:1-11:1): ii. Paul's Example (9:1-27): e. Self-Discipline to Receive the Final Reward

staple until Rome sieged the city in 146 BC, but they began again in the mid-first century AD—right around the time of Paul's letter to the Corinthians (see Historical-Cultural Context under Chapter 2: Works Tested by Fire: 1 Corinthians 3:10-15).[291] Further, athletic analogies frequently arose in the philosophical literature of the day,[292] and this choice may be intentional considering the dangerous cultural influences infiltrating the Corinthian church (see Historical-Cultural Context under Chapter 2: Works Tested by Fire). In other words, well-known philosophers of Paul's day often utilized fitness analogies to argue for their logic, and Paul may be Christianizing this common tactic as a way to appeal to the Corinthians. Paul may have also chosen this picture since two of the primary issues he needed to address included food and sexual behavior—two significant facets of health that athletes must rigorously discipline themselves in to maintain their physique and eventually receive the "perishable wreath" (v. 25) typically made of celery and/or pine leaves (v. 25).[293] Thus, Paul's choice of athletic pictures here almost certainly has significant intention behind it, as it appears tailored to the Corinthian Christian's surrounding culture and specific internal conflicts.

Theologically, then, what *is* this "imperishable" wreath, and how does the Christian obtain it? According to the contextual frame of communal, gospel-centered living for both the

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(9:24-27)," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:194-195; Garland, "VI. The Dispute over Food Sacrificed to Idols (8:1-11:1): C. Paul's Own Example to Undergird His Counsel (9:1-27)," in *1 Corinthians*, 350; Thiselton, "Commentary: IV. Responses to Inquiries about Marriage and Related Issues and Associations with Idols (7:1-11:1): B. Questions about Meat Associated with Idols and the Priority of Love over 'Rights' (8:1-11:1): 2. Second Part of Paul's Response: A Personal Example of Subordinating 'Rights' for the Good of the Whole (9:1-27): d. A Corroborative Example from Graeco-Roman Competitive Pursuits: The Need for Self-Control (9:24-27)," 710.

[291] Ellis, "Paul's Apostolic Status," 364.

[292] Ciampa and Rosner, "Commentary on 1 Corinthians: IV. 'Flee Idolatry' and 'Glorify God' in Your Worship, 8:1-14:40: A. Condemnation of Idolatrous Practices: 'Flee Idolatry' (Food Offered to Idols), 8:1-11:1: 3. Warning Regarding Objective Idolatry and the Downfall of 'the Knowledgable' in Corinth, 9:24-11:1: a. Athletes Who Lack Self-Restraint Do Not Receive the Prize, 9:24-27," 382; Garland, "Paul's Own Example," in *1 Corinthians*, 351; Thiselton, "Self-Control," 710.

[293] Ciampa and Rosner, "Athletes Who Lack Self-Restraint," 384; Thiselton, "Self-Control," 713.

salvific benefit of others (9:1-23a) and the cultivation of perseverance in the faith unto salvation (10:1-13), verses 24-27 serve as a transition into this latter discussion on the necessity of spiritual endurance and persistent faithfulness.[294] To live for the gospel, then, is to constantly discipline oneself and endure difficulties in pursuit of a later victory just as an athlete does; Paul and the Corinthians (and all believers), like the first-place runner, must be unrelentingly diligent in their training to win.[295] This athletic reference ties back to Paul's earlier statements warning against misusing Christian freedoms to live a carefree life (9:1-23a); all believers ought to be continually 'running' towards Christ and the gospel with their eyes towards salvation.[296] However, the athlete's goal of receiving a "perishable wreath" (9:25) made of vegetables and foliage,[297] signifying his physical triumph, is utterly put to shame in comparison to the "imperishable" glory of joint salvific victory in Christ. Nonetheless, the runner practices extreme restrictions and unrelentingly builds himself up through physical suffering all for this trivial prize anyway; Christians should consequently far outdo the athlete in his discipline and endurance with the anticipation of seeing the much more glorious, collective triumph in Christ. As Hays puts it, "If these athletes push themselves to the limit in training to win that pathetic crown of withered vegetables, how much more should we maintain self-discipline for the sake of an imperishable crown?"[298] Therefore, the context indicates the eternal crown of verse twenty-five represents

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[294] Schreiner, "Paul's Cultural Adaptation," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:193.

[295] Ciampa and Rosner, "Athletes Who Lack Self-Restraint," 384; Garland, "Paul's Own Example," in *1 Corinthians*, 351.

[296] The majority of commentators understand the imperishable wreath of verse twenty-five as referring to eternal life; Schreiner, "Self-Discipline," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:195; Garland, "Paul's Own Example," in *1 Corinthians*, 353-354; Schreiner and Caneday, "The Race to Be Run," 113-114.

[297] Thiselton, "Self-Control," 713.

[298] Richard B. Hays, "Responses to Contested Issues in Corinth: 1 Corinthians 7:1-15:58: 8:1-11:1: Idol Meat: The Apostolic Example of Renouncing Rights (9:1-27): Self-Discipline for the Sake of the Gospel (9:24-27),"

salvation itself that must be secured through self-control and perseverance as believers live "for the sake of the gospel" (9:23).[299]

The contrast of being "disqualified" (ἀδόκιμος) (9:27) in the supplemental boxing picture (vv. 26b-27) supports this conclusion. Paul uses this word elsewhere to describe unbelievers; note the following examples (emphases added):[300]

> And just as they (those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness; cf. 1:18) did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a *depraved* mind, to do those things that are not proper, people having been filled with all unrighteousness (Rom. 1:28);
>
> … do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you *fail* the test? But I expect that you will realize that we ourselves do not *fail* the test. Now we pray to God that you do nothing wrong; not so that we ourselves may appear approved, but that you may do what is right, though we may appear *unapproved* (2 Cor. 13:5-7);
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> For among them (the unrighteous; 3:2-4) are those … never able to come to the knowledge of the truth … so these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, *worthless* in regard to the faith (2 Tim. 3:6-8).

From these other Pauline uses of ἀδόκιμος, the 'disqualification' experienced by him who fails to persevere and bring himself under spiritual discipline (vv. 26b-27) is akin to being "filled with all unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:28) and "worthless in regard to the faith" (2 Tim. 3:8) because he "fail[ed] the test" of faith (2 Cor. 13:5). In other words, dropping out of the spiritual race ultimately forfeits 'partaking' in the gospel and salvation itself (v. 23b). However, because Paul draws a direct contrast between the disqualified and the victorious (9:24-27), the dropouts' loss corresponds to the victors' gain; if deserters of the gospel renounce salvation, then the

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in *First Corinthians*, eds. James Luther Mays and Paul J. Achtemeier, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 156, Adobe Digital Editions; cf. Garland, "Paul's Own Example," in *1 Corinthians*, 351; Thiselton, "Self-Control," 713; Schreiner, "Self-Discipline," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:195; Ellis, "Paul's Apostolic Status," 365.

[299] Schreiner and Caneday, "The Race to Be Run," 113-114.

[300] Word study of ἀδόκιμος conducted using Logos Bible software.

perseverant, lifelong faithful will emerge triumphant with Christ and will be crowned with the "imperishable" wreath—that is, salvation and eternal life.[301]

This interpretation also finds support in Paul's use of a running metaphor elsewhere in his letters with similar implications of joint spiritual victory in perseverance.[302] In Philippians 3, Paul speaks of giving up everything that he might gain Christ and make it to the resurrection (3:7-12), that he must continue to persevere in the faith and "press on" in order to win Christ (3:12-14), and that the Philippians are to similarly look forward to the resurrection and endure to the end (3:17-21). Additionally, right after the famous Hall of Faith chapter (Heb. 11), the author (presumably Paul) encourages his readers to "run with endurance the race" like the faithful that have come before (Heb. 12:1-2). Both passages utilize running as an image of communal endurance in the faith that will lead to Christ, heavily implying that a similar meaning is at play here in 1 Corinthians 9.

Several caveats must be clarified with this understanding. Firstly, as with other passages in this manuscript, this interpretation does *not* advocate for a works-based salvation. Rather, genuine faith finds validation in external works; true saving faith in Christ will be observable in the way the Christian lives "for the sake of the gospel" (9:23; cf. Jas. 2:14-26). Real faith will persevere to the end, convict the believer unto spiritual discipline, and eschew any kind of apathy in regard to the glory of Jesus Christ. Also, the apostle's stark contrast between "all" and "one" (v. 24)[303] seemingly draws a problematic picture of Christians competing against each other for first place. However, it must be recognized that team sports did not develop until much later in

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[301] Schreiner and Caneday, "The Race to Be Run," 113-114.

[302] Schreiner, "Self-Discipline," in *1 Corinthians*, 7:195.

[303] Ciampa and Rosner, "Athletes Who Lack Self-Restraint," 383.

history,[304] so the individualization present here is metaphorically necessary and should not be pressed too heavily. Rather than a single believer emerging victorious at the expense of the rest of the Church, Paul clearly intended to portray the winning runner as representative of all genuine believers—*all* who endure to the end will be crowned with the imperishable wreath.

The Crown of Pride (1 Thess. 2:19)

> For who *is* our hope, or joy or crown of pride, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? Or *is it* not indeed you?

The above verse, when isolated from its context, initially reads as if Paul anticipates receiving a literal "crown of pride"[305] at Christ's return if the Thessalonians remain faithful and perseverant in the gospel, implying that all those with exceptionally fruitful ministries will be especially rewarded with this same "crown" in the eschaton.[306] However, as with all of these passages, a holistic investigation into the historical and literary context reveals this "crown" to simply represent Paul's desire to see his apostolic mission among the Thessalonian Christians—whom he grew to love dearly as his "children" (2:7, 11)—fulfilled at the parousia.

The above verse constitutes the earliest chronological use of Paul's favored crown imagery, appearing in Paul's first biblical letter.[307] Creating a synoptic narrative between Acts

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[304] Garland, "Paul's Own Example," in *1 Corinthians*, 350.

[305] Other major translations typically give the gloss "crown of boasting" (CSB, ESV, LEB, NET, RSV), "crown in which we will glory" (NIV), or "crown of rejoicing" (NKJV).

[306] E.g., Charles A. Wanamaker, "Commentary on 1 Thessalonians: Narratio (2:1-3:10): Paul's Continuing Relation with His Persecuted Converts at Thessalonica (2:17-3:10): His Desire to See the Thessalonians and Attempts to Revisit Them (2:17-20)," in *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, eds. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 143 of 290, Hoopla Digital Ebooks; D. Michael Martin, "1 Thessalonians: II. Thanksgiving and Hope (1:2-3:13)," in *1, 2 Thessalonians*, eds. E. Ray Clendenen and David S. Dockery, The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 1995), 33:85, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[307] Note that while the first verse of this letter recognizes Paul, Timothy, and Silvanus (i.e., Silas) as the addressers and the epistle consistently uses first person plural pronouns, several elements imply that the epistle primarily came from Paul's hand (e.g., 2:18; 3:5; 5:27) (Wanamaker, "Attempts to Revisit," 141 of 290). Therefore,

17-18 and 1 Thessalonians allows the following historical framework for the letter: Paul, Timothy, and Silas had traveled to Thessalonica to plant another church among a mostly Gentile population (Acts 17:1-9)[308] but were quickly driven out by a Jewish opposition (Acts 17:1-9); Paul, Timothy, and Silas subsequently escaped to Berea but were followed by the Thessalonian persecutors, leading Timothy and Silas to send Paul out ahead of themselves (17:10-14); Paul ended up in Athens where he eventually reunited with his companions (Acts 17:14-15; 1 Thess. 3:1), but he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to check on the new church in the wake of their abrupt exit (1 Thess. 3:2-5); Paul then went to Corinth and later reconvened with Timothy and Silas (Acts 18:1, 5) where Timothy then gave his glowing report about the Thessalonian church (1 Thess. 3:6), ultimately prompting Paul to write this letter to the Thessalonians to explain why they had not returned, reiterate what they had been taught,[309] address some minor issues, and offer encouragement in continuing to persevere in their newfound faith despite the surrounding persecution.[310]

The epistle itself stands unique in its structure compared to other Pauline letters. Instead of the usual opening of a brief greeting, thanksgiving, and prayer, usually comprising about half

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while this section will refer to Paul as the singular writer, the implication is that the sentiment is coming from all three of the missionaries.

[308] Act 17:4 notes that the Thessalonian church was comprised of "some" Jews, a significant number of "God-fearing Greeks" (i.e., Gentiles), and several prominent women; Wanamaker, "Introduction: Paul and the Founding of the Church at Thessalonica," 36-38 of 290; Gordon D. Fee, "Introduction to 1 Thessalonians," in *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 33, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[309] Note the letter's common refrain of "you already know" (1:5; 2:1, 5, 9, 10, 11; 3:3; 4:2, 9; 5:1); Fee, "Introduction," in *Thessalonians*, 34.

[310] Wanamaker, "The Founding of the Church," 38-39 of 290; Fee, "Introduction," in *Thessalonians*, 35; F. F. Bruce, "Introduction: II. The Thessalonian Letters," in *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, eds. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, Ralph P. Martin, and Lynn Allan Losie, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 45:36-37, ProQuest Ebook Central.

of a first chapter (e.g., Rom. 1:1-15; 2 Cor. 1:1-11; Col. 1:1-12),[311] the first half of *the entire letter*—three chapters—speaks of Paul, Timothy, and Silas' relationship with the Thessalonians, interspersed with thanksgivings. In other words, the typical greeting and thanksgiving appear (1:1-3), followed by another thanksgiving (2:13), and the prayer report comes at the end of chapter three (3:11-13).[312] The text in between (1:4-2:12; 2:14-3:10) recalls the Thessalonians' open acceptance of the faith, the nurturing relationship that formed within the new church, the persecution imposed upon them, and an explanation of Paul's failure to return. Only in the latter half of the letter (4:1-5:11) does Paul address the church's internal issues on sexual ethics (4:1-8), working while awaiting the parousia (4:9-12), and the resurrection of the dead when Christ returns (4:13-5:11). Thus, the above verse appears during a description of Paul's deep desire to see the Thessalonians again (2:17-20) that falls between the second thanksgiving encouraging to perseverance (2:13-16) and Paul's explanation of sending Timothy to them (3:1-5).

Beginning in verse thirteen, Paul continues recalling the Thessalonians' uninhibited and straightforward acceptance of Christ despite the surrounding resistance. The apostle then draws a similarity between the Thessalonian church and the church in Judea: both have suffered persecution at the hands of their own neighbors and remained steadfast in their faith (2:14-15).[313] Why, exactly, Paul chose the Judean church here for the comparison is unclear, but the apostle may be intending to remind the Thessalonians that they have history on their side regarding standing strong in the face of severe Jewish opposition; the OT prophets, Christ himself, the first Christians (the Judeans)—and now the Thessalonians—have all come under significant hostility

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[311] Fee, "Commentary on 1 Thessalonians: Text, Exposition, and Notes: I. Thanksgiving, Narrative, and Prayer (1:1-3:13)," in *Thessalonians,* 36.

[312] Ibid.; Fee, "Introduction," in *Thessalonians,* 34; Bruce, "Thessalonian Letters," 45:43.

[313] Fee, "Thanksgiving," in *Thessalonians,* 36-37, 82, 85.

by spiritually hardened Jews but nonetheless clung to their hope in the Messiah.[314] This antagonism has subsequently obstructed Paul's (and other's) efforts in ministering to the Gentiles which, after their driving out of Thessalonica (2:15), now includes the brand-new Thessalonian (Gentile) Christians (2:16). The recollection's perspective in verse seventeen then splits from the Thessalonians and their church fathers *together* to just Paul, Timothy, and Silas after their unexpected departure. From here, Paul endeavors to explain why he and his companions could not return together after they had been ripped from their spiritual "children" (2:7, 11),[315] citing Satan's work in impeding their (especially Paul's) many attempts to return (2:17-18).[316] The key text here, then, reassures the Thessalonians of their spiritual fathers' profound affections towards them (2:19-20), so much so that had to know of the Thessalonians' condition and had to send Timothy alone as a concession (3:1-5).[317] Therefore, the key text here (2:19-20) reassures the Thessalonians that their fathers did not abandon them despite how Timothy's lone return may have first appeared.

Verse nineteen uses rhetorical, but strongly affectionate, language to reinforce the loving bond between the Thessalonians and Paul, Timothy, and Silas, describing their new Christian brothers as their "hope," "joy," and "crown of pride" when Christ returns. The relationship between this triad is somewhat difficult to discern, but the same disjunctive particle (ἤ) separates

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[314] Jeffrey A. D. Weima, "1 Thessalonians: III. Defense of Apostolic Actions and Absence (2:1-3:13): A. Defense of Past Actions in Thessalonica (2:1-16)," in *1-2 Thessalonians*, eds. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 167, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[315] Wanamaker, "Attempts to Revisit," 140 of 290; Bruce, "The First Letter to the Thessalonians: Chapter 2," 45:103.

[316] No sources specify the exact obstacles Paul attributes here to Satan, but Timothy likely elaborated on Paul's attempts once he returned from Athens (Acts 17:16, 18:5; 1 Thess. 3:1); Wanamaker, "Attempts to Revisit," 142 of 290; Fee, "Thanksgiving," in *Thessalonians*, 89-90.

[317] Fee, "Thanksgiving," in *Thessalonians*, 37.

"hope" and "joy," and "joy" and "crown of pride," suggesting that these three concepts do not parallel nor contrast one another but simply layer the doting description.[318] Paul's use of "hope" (ἐλπὶς) elsewhere in his letters, usually in the context of salvation (e.g., Rom. 8:24; Eph. 4:4; Tit. 1:2), typically conveys a sense of certainty—that is, part of Paul's devotion to them involves his confident expectation that the Thessalonians will stand beside him at Christ's parousia.[319] Secondly, the noun "joy" (χαρὰ) has an actionable connotation, as Paul will *rejoice* at seeing the Thessalonians at Christ's return, presumably because of his love for them as his spiritual children who have persevered through intense trials.[320] Finally, Paul calls the Thessalonians his "crown of pride"—the phrase most relevant to this manuscript.

Unsurprisingly, several elements of this phrase do not translate well to modern English. The "crown" Paul refers to, for example, does not allude to a metal, embellished diadem typically associated with the word; rather, similar to 1 Corinthians 9:24-25, "crown" here refers to the wreath bestowed upon the athletically or militarily victorious.[321] Therefore, the Thessalonians serve as proof of Paul's *victory* or *achievement* that he can "boast" or take "pride" in. This initially reads as if Paul worried about the Thessalonians because of how they could elevate himself before God, but the nuances of "pride" (καυχήσεως from καύχησις) reveal a meaning more consistent with Paul's teachings elsewhere that our source of "boasting" should come from God's grace alone (e.g., Rom. 3:27-28; 1 Cor. 1:29-31, 15:31; 2 Cor. 1:12). While the English notions of "pride" and "boasting" typically have negative overtones, the biblical

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[318] Martin, "Thanksgiving and Hope," in *1, 2 Thessalonians,* 33:84.

[319] Fee, "Thanksgiving," in *Thessalonians,* 91.

[320] Ibid.

[321] Wanamaker, "Attempts to Revisit," 143 of 290; Martin, "Thanksgiving and Hope," in *1, 2 Thessalonians,* 33:84-85; Fee, "Thanksgiving," in *Thessalonians,* 91; Bruce, "Chapter 2," 45:105.

καύχησις generally conveys a sense of putting one's confidence in or being assured in; thus, to "boast in the LORD" (Jer. 9:23-24, LXX) is to be completely confident in Yahweh.[322] Therefore, Paul is envisioning himself standing before Christ 'wearing' the perseverant Thessalonians as his crown of victorious assurance.[323] But what, exactly, is Paul assured of by the Thessalonians faithfulness? Considering Paul's words elsewhere about his converts serving as the "seal of [his] apostleship" (1 Cor. 9:2) and not wanting to "run" or "labor in vain" (Gal. 2:2; Phil 2:16),[324] Paul seems to be communicating that the Thessalonians' perseverance to the end would validate his work among them and serve as tangible evidence of Paul's faithfulness in carrying out his Christ-given apostolic mission.[325] This finds support in the following verse (2:20) where Paul reiterates this truth but exchanges "crown of pride" for "glory" (δόξα), giving "crown of pride" a connotation of Paul's gratification and faithful repute.[326] Thus, part of Paul's desire to return to the Thessalonians, calling them his "crown of pride" at the parousia, involves ensuring that his work among them would come to full maturity and not be lost, for "their failure to remain faithful would directly diminish his (Paul's) own sense of achievement and confidence at the coming of Christ."[327] Altogether, Paul sought to return to the Thessalonians because (1) he fervently loved them and expected to see them among the saved ("hope"), (2) their standing before Christ despite intense persecution would innately inspire Paul's rejoicing ("joy"), and (3)

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[322] Fee, "Thanksgiving," in *Thessalonians,* 91; Bruce, "Chapter 2," 45:106.

[323] Fee, "Thanksgiving," in *Thessalonians,* 92.

[324] Wanamaker, "Attempts to Revisit," 143 of 290; Bruce, "Chapter 2," 45:105.

[325] Ibid.; Martin, "Thanksgiving and Hope," in *1, 2 Thessalonians,* 33:84.

[326] Abbott-Smith, "δόμα," 121.

[327] Wanamaker, "Attempts to Revisit," 143 of 290; Bruce, "Chapter 2," 45:105.

their steadfastness in the faith would demonstrate Paul's own faithfulness in fulfilling his mission ("crown of pride/glory").

Timothy's going alone back to Thessalonica is thus caveated by this description Paul offers in verse nineteen; Paul cared deeply for the Thessalonians as his "hope," "joy," and "crown of pride," but because his attempts at returning were repeatedly hindered by Satan (v. 18), he had to just send Timothy (3:1-5).[328] In this context of Paul longing to reunite with the Thessalonians, "crown of pride" signifies nothing more than Paul's desire to see his apostolic purpose fulfilled so that he himself may stand before Christ in complete confidence. This interpretation consequently does not speak of a tangible "crown" that corresponds to a particular heavenly reward outside of salvation;[329] rather, this verse speaks of Paul yearning for his converts' perseverance so that his apostolic work among them would not be rendered futile and he could stand before Christ in complete assurance of his faithful apostleship.

The Crown of Righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8)

> In the future there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Whereas the other "crown" passages analyzed in this manuscript require a more thorough contextual framework to support an equal-rewards view, the above statement made by Paul in his second letter to Timothy explicitly clarifies that this crown will be bestowed upon *all* believers ("to all who have loved His appearing"). Nonetheless, commentators will frequently tie Paul's language back into the rewards conversation, typically arguing that while this "crown of

[328] Fee, "Thanksgiving," in *Thessalonians,* 90.

[329] Cf. Wanamaker, "Attempts to Revisit," 143 of 290; Martin, "Thanksgiving and Hope," in *1, 2 Thessalonians,* 33:85.

righteousness" will apply to all Christians at the Parousia, it still signifies a merited prize.[330] The brief discussion below will establish that this verse simply depicts the eschatological confirmation of the believer's faith before the Lord.

The extensive history of Paul and Timothy's camaraderie and brotherhood need not be exhausted here, but Timothy's significant supportive role in Paul's ministry cannot be overstated.[331] This letter comes from Paul as he sits in a Roman prison cell awaiting his second "defense" (1:12-18; 4:16), i.e., he will soon face the next phase of his trial for preaching the gospel of Christ (1:11-12; 2:8-9). However, Paul does not anticipate his upcoming defense ending in anything other than execution (4:6-7, 18), and so most of the epistle reads as a final encouragement and exhortation to Paul's closest coworker. Timothy's exact location at the time of this second writing is unclear, but Timothy's service in Ephesus recorded in Paul's first letter (1 Tim. 1:3) plus the allusions to Ephesus in this second letter (e.g., 1:18; 2:17; 4:12, 14, 19; cf. 1 Tim. 1:20; Acts 18:18-26) suggest that Timothy was still serving the Ephesian church when this second letter from Paul arrived.[332] Paul's first epistle primarily offered Timothy guidance on

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[330] E.g., Donald Guthrie, "2 Timothy: Commentary: 8. Paul's Farewell Message (4:1-18): b. A Triumphal Confession (4:6-8)," in *The Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Leon Morris, Second ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1990), 14:3j, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[331] Acts records Paul and Timothy first meeting on Paul' second missionary journey where Timothy's reputation as a strong believer had already been established among his neighbors (Acts 16:1-3). From there, Timothy joined Paul's mission, becoming coworkers for the gospel with a father-son relationship (cf. 1 Cor. 4:15-17; 1 Tim. 2). Most of Paul's epistles mention Timothy, as he often served as Paul's representative of and co-author with Paul (e.g., Rom. 16:21; 1 Thess. 1:1, 3:6; 2 Thess. 1:1; 1 Cor. 16:10-11; 2 Cor. 1:19; Phil. 1:1; Philem. 1:1); William D. Mounce, "Introduction: The PE within the Framework of Paul's Life: Historical Reconstruction from Acts," in *Pastoral Epistles*, eds. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, Ralph P. Martin, and Lynn Allan Losie, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 46:xlviii-xlix, ProQuest Ebook Central; George W. Knight, III, "Introduction: Self-Testimony Regarding Authorship, Recipients, Setting, and Purposes: Recipients," in *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 51-53 of 486, Hoopla Digital Ebooks.

[332] Guthrie, "Introduction: 4. The Problem of the Historical Allusions," 14:5; Knight, "Introduction: Setting and Concerns," 54-55 of 486; Philip H. Towner, "Introduction: IV. Reading the Letters in Historical Context: B. Reading the Letters as Letters: The Historical Character of the Letters to Timothy and Titus," in *The Letters to*

handling the Ephesian church's various false teachings and opponents,[333] and while this second letter also offers further guidance on these same issues (2:14-3:9),[334] it primarily consists of Paul encouraging Timothy to carry on the work of the gospel in steadfastness, endurance, and faithfulness (1:3-2:13, 3:1-4:8). Consequently, heartfelt language permeates this farewell from the great Apostle to the Gentiles as he passes the torch to his "son in the faith" (1 Tim. 1:2) in light of his soon-coming martyrdom.

The letter begins with Paul encouraging Timothy to remember his giftings, boldly and fearlessly proclaim Christ, carry on Paul's teachings, and pursue the gospel even if it entails suffering just as Paul is suffering (1:3-2:13). As mentioned above, Paul then briefly addresses the issues with Timothy's (presumably Ephesian) church (2:14-3:9), and then the latter half of the letter returns to encouragement, warning, and the hope of Christ's return (3:1-4:8). The epistle closes with Paul giving an update on his trial, reaffirming his confidence in the Lord's sovereignty, and urging Timothy to come see him before winter (i.e., before his second defense and probable execution) (4:9-22). Based on this outline, the verse in question (4:8) concludes the epistle's main exhortatory portion (3:1-4:8) where Paul warns Timothy that he must be prepared for the sin, false teaching, and opposition to the gospel that will increasingly saturate the "last days" as Christ's return draws nearer and nearer (3:1-9), designating the persecution of "all who

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Timothy and Titus, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 75, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[333] The exact nature of these false teachings is not explicated in the letter, but gnostic and Jewish influences are likely (cf. 1 Tim. 1:4, 7; 2:11-18; 4:1-3, 5:15-25; 6:20 ["knowledge" = γνώσεως from γνῶσις]); Guthrie, "Historical Allusions," 14:5-6; Guthrie, "Introduction: 6. The Heresies Reflected in the Epistles," 14:16b-16c; Knight, "Recipients," 52 of 486; Knight, "Setting and Concerns," 56; Towner, "Historical Character of the Letters," 77-79; Robert L. Thomas and Andreas Köstenberger, "2 Timothy: Introduction: 1. Summary," in *1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, and Titus*, eds. Tremper Longman and David E. Garland, Revised ed., The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 342, Adobe Digital Editions.

[334] Towner, "Introduction: IV. Reading the Letters in Historical Context: A. The Literary Character of the Letters to Timothy and Titus," 68.

want to live in a godly way in Christ Jesus" (3:12) ultimately inevitable (3:10-13); however, Timothy must remember the Scriptures he has known since childhood and constantly seek them for godly wisdom in the days ahead (3:15-17; cf. 1:5). Finally, Paul concludes his farewell address by charging Timothy to faithfully persevere in his work for the Kingdom despite those who will willingly turn away from the truth (4:1-5), for Timothy should look forward to the day when Christ will award the "crown of righteousness" (4:8) to all genuine Christ followers (4:6-8).

Paul opens this closing battle call (4:1-8) with a weighty and somber picture: as if Paul is 'passing the torch' Timothy before the eschatological throne, Paul turns to God and Christ in charging Timothy with faithfully shepherding believers (4:1-2). The language of solemn exhortation (Διαμαρτύρομαι; v. 1) often appeared in Greek inauguration ceremonies, giving the statement formality, but the invocation of the divine Judge severely deepens the gravitas surrounding this charge.[335] In light of verses 6-8 where Paul speaks of being awarded righteousness, Paul almost certainly does not intend to threaten Timothy; rather, the solemnity should remind him that his faith will be confirmed by living for the gospel.[336] Timothy must heed this exhortation to combat the increasing opposition to the truth (vv. 3-4; cf. 3:1-9)—he must fight against the escalating hardness of heart and boldly "preach the word" (v. 2) to "fulfill [his] ministry" (v. 5).[337] Finally, Paul shifts to speaking of his own circumstances and reveals *why* he is

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[335] Guthrie, "2 Timothy: Commentary: 8. Paul's Farewell Message (4:1-8): a. The Final Charge (4:1-5)," 14:3g; Knight, "Commentary on 2 Timothy: Final Charge and Final Testimony (4:1-8): Final Charge to Timothy (4:1-5)," 461-462 of 486; Towner, "The Second Letter in Timothy: II. Body of the Letter (1:3-4:18): D. Prophecy, Commitment and Call (3:1-4:8): 3. The Final Charge to Timothy (4:1-8)," 422; Thomas and Köstenberger, "2 Timothy: IV. Further Charges (3:1-4:8): C. Preach the Word (4:1-8)," 389.

[336] Towner, "Final Charge to Timothy," 424.

[337] Ibid., 429-430; Guthrie, "Final Charge," 14:3h-3i; Knight, "Final Charge to Timothy," 464-466 of 486; Knight, "Commentary on 2 Timothy: Final Charge and Final Testimony (4:1-8): Paul's Final Testimony (4:6-8)," 468 of 486.

giving this heavy-laden farewell: "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come" (v. 6). This phrase of "being poured out" refers to the wine often poured alongside a sacrifice; in essence, Paul is conveying his life as a sacrifice, that he has given up his life for the gospel, and his blood will soon be "poured out" (cf. Phil 2:17).[338] Further, the present-progressive form σπένδομαι ("already poured out" or "currently being poured out") portrays Paul's death as already *in progress* and inevitable,[339] and ἀναλύσεώς ("departure," lit. "loosening") often referred to death in other Greek sources of the time (e.g., Philo;[340] cf. Phil. 1:23).[341] Therefore, to paraphrase this verse outside of its metaphorical language, Timothy must soberly take this final advisement because Paul anticipates execution soon and will no longer be around as a spiritual mentor and father in the faith. However, Paul does not look to his death with dread or fear; he reflects on his life of ministry with complete confidence, depicting his Christian walk in classic Pauline athletic metaphor of "fighting" and "finishing" well (v. 7).[342] Paul has no doubt that he has persevered in the faith, proclaimed the true gospel, and remained fiercely devoted to Christ ("I have kept the faith," v. 7),[343] and this assurance leads to verse eight where he looks to the final day when Christ will bestow upon him the "crown of righteousness."

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[338] Guthrie, "Triumphal Confession," 14:3i; Knight, "Paul's Final Testimony," 468 of 486; Towner, "Final Charge to Timothy," 432; Thomas and Köstenberger, "Preach the Word," 393.

[339] Knight, "Paul's Final Testimony," 468 of 486; Towner, "Final Charge to Timothy," 431.

[340] Philo, *Flaccus*, trans. F. H. Colson, Loeb Classical Library 363 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 187, doi:10.4159/DLCL.philo_judaeus-flaccus.1941.

[341] Guthrie, "Triumphal Confession," 14:3i; Knight, "Paul's Final Testimony," 468 of 486.

[342] Note that Paul does not say he "won" the race but "finished" it (cf. 1 Cor. 9:24-27); Guthrie, "Triumphal Confession," 14:3j; Knight, "Paul's Final Testimony," 470 of 486.

[343] Knight, "Paul's Final Testimony," 469-470 of 486; Towner, "Final Charge to Timothy," 432-433.

Paul clarifies his focus by opening verse eight with λοιπὸν ("in the future") which carries the connotation of "what still remains to be realized as contrasted with those things already accomplished"[344]—the only thing left in Paul's sight is the "crown of righteousness."[345] The athletic imagery of verse seven continues, as the "reserved" (ἀπόκειταί from ἀπόκειμαι) "crown" (στέφανος) refers to the victor's wreath set aside for the contest winners.[346] However, the precise meaning behind "crown of righteousness" (δικαιοσύνης στέφανος) lies at the heart of this verse's controversy, specifically regarding how to interpret the genitive. Some commentators understand the genitive as possessive ("the righteous' crown" or "the crown for the righteous") and subsequently understand the phrase as depicting a rewarded "crown" for those who have lived righteously through Christ (i.e., all believers).[347] In other words, the possessive interpretation understands this "crown" as a merited reward for godly living that would be given to all legitimate believers.[348] In contrast, the genitive could also be taken as epexegetical ("the crown that is righteousness") and simply refer to the full manifestation of righteousness bestowed upon the believer by Christ at the final judgement (i.e., glorification).[349] Both of these grammatical interpretations are feasible[350] and neither necessarily indicates that only *some* believers will receive this "crown," but the latter, epexegetical reading does find greater support in other Pauline letters. The other instances where a genitive noun qualifies στέφανος ("crown") are

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[344] Guthrie, "Triumphal Confession," 14:3j.

[345] Towner, "Final Charge to Timothy," 434.

[346] Ibid.; Guthrie, "Triumphal Confession," 14:3j-3k.

[347] E.g., Guthrie, "Triumphal Confession," 14:3j.

[348] Ibid.

[349] Thomas and Köstenberger, "Preach the Word," 393, 396.

[350] Mounce, "2 Timothy: IV. Instructions for Timothy and the Opponents (2:14-4:8): C. Encouragement and Proclamation (3:10-4:8)," 46:582.

generally considered epexegetical (1 Thess. 2:19; Jas. 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 2:10, 12:1),[351] and this notion of receiving righteousness in glorification coincides well with other theological statements made by Paul (e.g., Gal. 5:5).[352] Thus, Paul can say with complete confidence that his faith has been successfully validated by his perseverance and sacrificial living for the gospel of Christ, and he can consequently anticipate the bestowal of perfect righteousness on the final day.[353] With no doubts about his salvation, Paul looks to the crown of righteousness that is the "approval by and full attainment of righteousness through the Lord Jesus Christ."[354]

The latter half of the verse further supports this conclusion. Firstly, the parallel between "crown of righteousness" (*δικαιοσύνης* στέφανος) and Christ as the "righteous Judge" (*δίκαιος* κριτής) implies a confirmation of allegiance; one can only receive perfect righteousness by devoting oneself *to* perfect righteousness—that is, Christ.[355] Thus, the bestowal of the "crown of righteousness" from the "righteous Judge" signifies a salvific identification with him and his victory (cf. Rom. 4:5, 5:17; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil 3:9). Additionally, the universal nature of this "crown" cannot be avoided; Paul emphasizes that Christ will give this crown of righteousness to every believer, to "all who have loved His (Christ's) appearing," and it is fundamentally unfathomable that there could be an authentic Christian who did *not* long for Christ's return. If this "crown" will be given to all believers, then it logically must coincide with the eschatological hopes promised to all believers, namely, salvation and glorification (Rom. 8:30; 1 Cor. 1:8; 1 Thess. 3:13; Col. 1:22; Phil. 1:6, 3:20-2).

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[351] Ibid.; Knight, "Paul's Final Testimony," 470 of 486.

[352] Thomas and Köstenberger, "Preach the Word," 393.

[353] Mounce, "Encouragement and Proclamation," 46:581-582.

[354] Thomas and Köstenberger, "Preach the Word," 396.

[355] Knight, "Paul's Final Testimony," 471 of 486; Towner, "Final Charge to Timothy," 435.

In the letter's specific context, this final statement serves to encourage Timothy in faithfully persevering, enduring hardship, and carrying out his ministerial assignment with Christ's "crown of righteousness" always in focus.[356] The image here depicts Paul, Timothy, and all their converts standing before Christ as he vindicates their faith and confers his perfect righteousness upon them.[357] This picture should be Timothy's (and all Christians') ultimate motivation to serve well and live out his faith. From here, Paul closes his letter with typical logistics and urging Timothy to come visit before his execution. Altogether, several elements point to the "crown of righteousness" mentioned in Paul's second letter to Timothy as referring simply to the eschatological righteousness (i.e., glorification) bestowed upon the believer when Christ returns.

The Crown of Glory (1 Pet. 5:4)

And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Moving beyond the Pauline corpus, this verse in Peter's first epistle seemingly presents an obvious case for a differential, crown-based reward system. A quick reading of the whole passage (5:1-5) initially presents church elders ("you" in v. 4) as specifically eligible for this "crown of glory," inadvertently placing leaders in the church above lay Christians within the supposed heavenly hierarchy. Further, many contextual elements surrounding this passage are either unknown or unspecific, leaving the reader with a relatively weak framework for interpretation. Regardless of these difficulties, the information available still manages to counter

[356] Guthrie, "Triumphal Confession," 14:3k.

[357] Knight, "Paul's Final Testimony," 471 of 486.

this conventional interpretation[358] and presents the "crown of glory" as a depiction of *all* believers' glorification in Christ.

Several facets of the letter's historical situation cannot be pinned down with certainty (or even probability), and this general lack of confidence stems from whether the epistle actually came from the Apostle Peter. Scholars hotly dispute the letter's authorship for several reasons,[359] but the following discussion will assume the traditional stance of authentic Petrine authorship from the mid-60s AD.[360] Further, Peter notes that he wrote the letter from "Babylon," yet this could be understood literally as the Mesopotamian Babylon on the Euphrates River or as a symbolic reference to Rome.[361] Considering physical Babylon's lack of first-century significance, Peter and Mark's associations with Rome, and the commonalities between OT Babylon and NT Rome regarding oppression and persecution, a symbolic interpretation of "Babylon" as Rome has the most support.[362] Early Christianity understood Peter's reference this way, and a literal interpretation only came to the forefront once Protestantism tried to rid Scripture of giving any authority to Rome and the Catholic Church.[363] Regarding recipients, the first verse of the epistle

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[358] Such an interpretation is coherent, especially considering John's vision of the twenty-four elders "cast[ing] their crowns before the throne" (Rev. 4:10).

[359] Peter H. Davids, "Introduction: II. Authorship," in *The First Epistle of Peter*, eds. Ned B. Stonehouse, F. F. Bruce, Gordon D. Fee, and Joel B. Green, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 24-26, ProQuest Ebook Central; Paul J. Achtemeier, "Introduction: I. Authorship," in *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter*, ed. Eldon Jay Epp, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), 1-2, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvb9364z; J. Ramsey Michaels, "Introduction: Authorship and Date," in *1 Peter*, eds. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and Ralph P. Martin, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 49:126 of 584 , Hoopla Digital Ebooks.

[360] Davids, "Introduction: IV. Date and Place of Writing," in *First Epistle of Peter*, 28.

[361] Achtemeier, "Introduction: IV. Literary Shape of 1 Peter," 63; David G. Horrell and Travis B. Williams, "Introduction: Place of Origin," in *1 Peter: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary: Volume 1: Chapters 1-2*, International Critical Commentary (London, UK: T & T Clark, 2023), 1:190-192, Bloomsbury Collections.

[362] Achetmeier, "Literary Shape," 63; Horrell and Williams, "Place of Origin," 1:190-192.

[363] Ibid.

notes the letter going to Christians in "Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithnyia," which comprised the northwest region of Asia Minor along the Black Sea.[364] Paul apparently could not travel to this area besides southern Galatia (cf. Acts 16:6-10), and how exactly these individuals were introduced to Christianity and developed a relationship with Peter remains unknown.[365] Such a wide audience sets a generalized and broad (as opposed to personalized and specific) tone for the epistle's contents,[366] but the basic impetus appears to concern persecution.[367] Interestingly, government sponsored persecution did not appear until the early second century under Emperor Trajan; thus, the harassment spoken of in 1 Peter most likely occurred on a social and local scale.[368] Finally, the ethnoreligious status of Peter's audience had to be mixed (both Jew and Gentile) considering the letter's address to Christians in all of northwestern Asia Minor, and the epistle itself supports this reasoning. For example, the letter contains several references to the OT and Jewish history (e.g., 1:1, 1:16; 2:3-11, 22-24; 3:14, 20; 4; 4:18; 5:5, 13), but other portions call back to his audience's past pagan lifestyle (e.g., 1:14, 18; 2:10, 25; 4:3-4).[369] Altogether, then, the epistle came from Peter in Rome as a source of guidance and encouragement to the churches in northwestern Asia Minor facing social persecution.[370]

The letter itself follows the standard format found in other NT epistles, with a greeting (1:1-2), gospel-centered blessing (1:3-12), the main body (1:13-5:12), and greetings/closing

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[364] Davids, "Introduction: III. Recipients," in *First Epistle of Peter*, 27.

[365] Ibid.

[366] Achtemeier, "Introduction: III. Readers," 50.

[367] Achtemeier, "Authorship," 23.

[368] Ibid.; Davids, "Recipients," in *First Epistle of Peter*, 33-36.

[369] Achtemeier, "Readers," 51; Michaels, "Introduction: Audience: Gentile Christians," 49:114 of 584.

[370] Achtemeier, "Literary Shape," 64.

statements (5:13-14).[371] As mentioned above, the epistle addresses persecuted Christians, but the first half of the body simply discusses ethical everyday Christian living in the contexts of government, marriage, suffering, and the end times (2:11-4:11), and then the second half turns to the issue of persecution within their churches (4:12-5:11).[372] This latter half of the body can be further divided into three sections: the privilege of being able to identify with Christ's sufferings (4:12-19), the role of elders in shepherding a persecuted church (5:1-5), and a final exhortation to humility, sober-mindedness, and perseverance in the face of persecution and suffering (5:6-11). Therefore, the verse above appears in the middle of Peter's discussion of church leaders properly guiding their congregations in the midst of increasingly hostile social oppression and harassment.

Backtracking to the beginning of this small section (5:1-5), Peter transitions by directly addressing church leaders as a "fellow elder," "witness" of Christ's sufferings, and "fellow partaker of the glory that is to be revealed" (v. 1).[373] The passage opens with Peter establishing his qualifications for giving the following advice (vv. 2-3); not only does he empathize with these elders as a peer ("fellow elder"),[374] but his guidance comes from his identification with Christ in his sufferings and glorification. While "witness" (μάρτυς) could refer to Peter's physical observation of Christ's pain and death, Peter's (and the other disciples') abandonment

[371] Horrell and Williams, "Introduction: Genre, Literary Integrity, and Structure," 1:30.

[372] Davids, "Introduction: VIII. Outline," in *First Epistle of Peter*, 42; Michaels, "Introduction: Structure and Integrity," 49:108 of 584.

[373] Recall that in 1 Corinthians 9:23b (see the previous section), Paul utilized the same word Peter uses here to describe 'partaking' of salvation (συγκοινωνὸς and κοινωνός, respectively). However, Peter simply employs the root word (κοινωνός), while Paul, in keeping with his primary objective to portray his and the Corinthians' salvation as a *joint* spiritual victory, compounds κοινωνός with συν- to create a stronger emphasis on solidarity and unity than Peter does here.

[374] Davids, "Text, Exposition, and Notes: IV. Coming to Grips with Christian Suffering (4:12-5:11): B. The Inner-Church Response to Suffering (5:1-5)," in *First Epistle of Peter*, 136.

of Christ at his arrest (Matt. 26:69-75; Mark 14:50; cf. Luke 22:54)[375] renders μάρτυς as more likely referring to Peter's proud proclamation of the gospel and his subsequent suffering (cf. μάρτυς in Rev. 2:13, 11:3, 17:6).[376] Thus, to suffer for the gospel indicates a unity with Christ as he suffered, ultimately leading to a parallel unity with Christ's exaltation ("partaker of the glory").[377] Peter's identification with Christ also applies to those elders being addressed, as indicated by the prefix συμ- ("fellow"); Peter's guidance to the persecuted elders (vv. 2-3) carries weight because of his similar status as a peer church leader, a co-sufferer with Christ, and a future sharer in Christ's glory.

After establishing his qualifications, Peter gives his trifold instruction on how to lead God's "flock"—not Peter's flock, not the elder's, but *God's* (v. 2a).[378] He opens the order with an ingressive aorist imperative ποιμάνατε, coloring the exhortation as an action needing reinvigoration.[379] To properly "shepherd the flock of God" first means guiding God's people with a willing spirit (v. 2b) despite the intense undertaking of pastoring a persecuted church. Leaders were typically appointed by the congregation (cf. Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5), they often still had to work outside the church to support their families, and they were regularly the first targets of persecution, making such an attitude of obligation an understandable default mindset for

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[375] Achtemeier, "Commentary: Body Closing: 5:1-5: Appropriate Conduct in the Community," 323; David G. Horrell and Travis B. Williams, "Third Major Section of the Letter-Body (4.12-5.11): Community (5.1-5)," in *1 Peter: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary: Volume 2: Chapters 3-5*, International Critical Commentary (London, UK: T & T Clark, 2023), 2:510-511, Bloomsbury Collections; Michaels, "1 Peter: Text and Commentary: Appeal to Elders (5:1-5)," 49:345 of 584.

[376] μάρτυς ("witness") originally referred to a believer who would suffer for the sake of the gospel, but the word eventually came to mean one who would die for the faith (hence, "martyr"); Achtemeier, "Appropriate Conduct," 323-324; Horrell and Williams, "Community," 2:509-510; Michaels, "Appeal to Elders," 49:345 of 584.

[377] Davids, "Inner-Church Response," in *First Epistle of Peter*, 137.

[378] Ibid.; Horrell and Williams, "Community," 2:519.

[379] Davids, "Inner-Church Response," in *First Epistle of Peter*, 137.

elders.[380] Secondly, church leaders should not see their position as a financial venture (v. 2c) even though they usually received modest support from their congregation (Matt. 10:10; 1 Cor. 9:3-14; 1 Tim. 5:17-18); their oversight should be done with the eternal perspective of serving God.[381] Finally, elders are to lead God's people by example—humbly representing Christ with servant-leadership—not by dictatorially exerting their authority (v. 3).[382] The general tone of the letter suggests that these instructions are applicable to all elders,[383] and if church leaders follow these guidelines, then their work will be recognized at Christ's return with the "crown of glory" (v. 4). The passage concludes with Peter turning to the believers not in leadership ("younger men")[384] and calls them to humbly submit themselves to their elders' guidance (v. 5), citing Proverbs 3:34 to demonstrate the necessity of humility in God's Kingdom.[385] All this advice to internal churches comes in the context of persecution, that this is how a Christian community should function and serve one another as their suffering increases and the final day draws near (cf. 4:7-11).[386]

Based on this contextual framework, verse four serves as the rightful motivation for elders' godly leadership as outlined in the previous two verses—that is, to participate in Christ's

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[380] Ibid.; Horrell and Williams, "Community," 2:522-523; Michaels, "Appeal to Elders," 49:347 of 584.

[381] Davids, "Inner-Church Response," in *First Epistle of Peter*, 138; Achtemeier, "Appropriate Conduct," 326; Michaels, "Appeal to Elders," 49:348 of 584.

[382] Michaels, "Appeal to Elders," 49:349 of 584.

[383] Horrell and Williams, "Community," 2:521-522.

[384] Commentators debate the precise meaning behind "younger men," but most interpret the phrase as a contrast to "elders," referring to all those not serving in leadership (i.e., the rest of the church); Davids, "Inner-Church Response," in *First Epistle of Peter*, 140-141; Horrell and Williams, "Community," 2:543; Michaels, "Appeal to Elders," 49:350 of 584.

[385] Davids, "Inner-Church Response," in *First Epistle of Peter*, 141; Horrell and Williams, "Community," 2:550; Michaels, "Appeal to Elders," 49:351 of 584.

[386] Michaels, "Appeal to Elders," 49:352 of 584.

eschatological victory. Peter depicts the relationship between God and elders as earthly shepherds (v. 2) serving under the "Chief Shepherd" as his representative, and they must guide his "flock" in a manner worthy of himself (cf. vv. 2-3; 2:21-24).[387] Interestingly, the first chapter of the epistle reiterates the gospel message by describing Christ's first lowly advent as appearing as a "lamb unblemished and spotless" (1:7, 20), yet here, in his glorified state, he will appear as a "Chief Shepherd."[388] In this way, Peter continues the theme of identifying with Christ in his sufferings *and* exaltation (v. 1) by exhorting these earthly shepherds to do the same: they ought to serve humbly, kindly, and sacrificially, just as Christ did, and they will gain the "crown of glory," just as Christ is glorified and will return in glory.[389] Since κομιεῖσθε ("you will receive," from κομίζω) frequently describes being paid for work,[390] the verse initially seems to portray the "crown of glory" as a form of payment for godly service;[391] however, particularly in eschatological discussions, NT writers also use this verb to describe "eschatological recompense," whether that means reward *or* judgement (e.g., 2 Cor. 5:10; Col. 3:25; Eph. 6:8; Heb. 11:39).[392] Thus, considering the context of Christ's second appearing (4:7-19), Peter likely

[387] Davids, "Inner-Church Response," in *First Epistle of Peter*, 139; Achtemeier, "Appropriate Conduct," 329; Horrell and Williams, "Community," 2:532-533.

[388] Michaels, "Appeal to Elders," 49:349 of 584.

[389] The grammar does not translate well into English, but the beginning imperative of verse two (ποιμάνατε) followed by the καὶ opening verse four implies a conditional format to verses 2-4: "*If* you shepherd the flock … *then* you will receive …" (Achtemeier, "Appropriate Conduct," 329; Horrell and Williams, "Community," 2:532-533).

[390] Davids, "Inner-Church Response," in *First Epistle of Peter*, 139; Michaels, "Appeal to Elders," 49:349 of 584.

[391] Cf. Davids, "Inner-Church Response," in *First Epistle of Peter*, 139.

[392] Achtemeier, "Appropriate Conduct," 329.

implements this verb to invoke the general sense of justly receiving one's due at the final judgement, whether good or bad.[393]

In line with the other "crown" texts discussed in this chapter, the "crown" here (στέφανον, from στέφανος) refers to an athlete's or military leader's wreath of victory (as opposed to the modern associations with royalty),[394] but this στέφανος is qualified by "unfading" and "of glory." The word behind "unfading" (ἀμαράντινον, from ἀμαράντινος; lit. "of amaranths") originates from a dark red flower (amaranth) that had a particular capacity to maintain its color and form and was subsequently used in Greco-Roman victory crowns.[395] Such a picture does not intend to draw a contrast between withering earthly wreaths and an ever-thriving heavenly crown,[396] but rather it simply depicts this "crown of glory" as also resistant to wilting (i.e., eternality).[397] Now, also in line with other "crown" texts, scholars dispute how to interpret the genitive "of glory," as some understand it as definitive/attributive ("the glorious crown/the crown depicting glory")[398] or epexegetical ("the crown that is glory").[399] Neither of these grammatical renderings necessarily indicate this "crown" as reserved for specific saints (i.e., both could support universal reward as a picture of salvation); however, Peter's previous statements about the "glory" (δόξα) believers will gain through Christ (e.g., 1:7; 4:13-14; 5:1)

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[393] Ibid.

[394] Davids, "Inner-Church Response," in *First Epistle of Peter*, 139; Horrell and Williams, "Community," 2:535-536.

[395] Achtemeier, "Appropriate Conduct," 330; Horrell and Williams, "Community," 2:536-537.

[396] Cf. Achtemeier, "Appropriate Conduct," 330.

[397] Horrell and Williams, "Community," 2:537.

[398] E.g., Achtemeier, "Appropriate Conduct," 330.

[399] E.g., Horrell and Williams, "Community," 2:537-538; Michaels, "Appeal to Elders," 49:349 of 584.

heavily suggest that the genitive be taken epexegetically.[400] Therefore, Christ-like shepherds (cf. vv. 2-3) will receive "glory" at Christ's return.

Moreover, these statements of *all* believers participating in Christ's glory because of their identification with him (1:7-8, 20-21; 4:13-14; 5:1, 10) point to the universality of this "crown of glory"—it is a collective glory bestowed upon all in Christ,[401] not a reward given only to faithful church leaders.[402] This promise of a "crown of glory" does not intend to incentivize leaders with extra honor or recognition,[403] but rather tells elders that *their* faith will be validated and confirmed through faithful fulfillment of *their* God-given assignment (i.e., godly shepherding; cf. vv. 2-3), that "the elders will receive their 'crown' like everyone else in the congregation, for doing what they were called to do."[404] The reception of the "crown of glory" signifies true faith that manifested in Kingdom service, regardless of one's specific role (4:10; cf. Eph. 4:7-16). Accordingly, Peter singles out elders here in verse four because the passage at large (vv. 1-5) only addresses godly leadership within the church and focuses on exhorting elders to perseverance and faithful service in the midst of persecution. All these components lead to the "crown of glory" (v. 4) simply conveying the glorification all believers will receive through Christ at his return: "Just as Christ received glory after suffering in the flesh (1:11, 21; 4:13), so

[400] The same phrase (δόξης στέφανον, "crown of glory") appears twice in the LXX (Jer. 13:18; 2:15) but in non-eschatological contexts (Horrell and Williams, "Community," 2:537-538; Michaels, "Appeal to Elders," 49:349 of 584).

[401] Michaels, "Appeal to Elders," 49:349 of 584; Blomberg, "Degrees of Reward?" 164.

[402] Cf. Achtemeier, "Appropriate Conduct," 330.

[403] Cf. Davids, "Inner-Church Response," in *First Epistle of Peter,* 139.

[404] This pairs well with the crown imagery featured in Jewish apocalyptic literature where the divine giving of a crown signified eschatological victory and salvation (e.g., T.Benj. 4:1) (Horrell and Williams, "Community," 2:538; Michaels, "Appeal to Elders," 49:349 of 584).

also elders, along with the entire believing community (1:7; 4:14; 5:1, 10) will receive the glory that awaits in heaven."[405]

The Crown of Life (Jas. 1:12)

> Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

The above verse speaks of Christians receiving the "crown of life" upon persevering through trial and emerging from difficult earthly circumstances with their faith still rooted in Christ. However, similar to 2 Timothy 4:8 ("the crown of righteousness"), the reward implications of this "crown" passage are easily discounted due to the universal nature of the surrounding statements (i.e., "the crown of life" given to "those who love Him" depicting all believers receiving eternal life). The majority of scholars concur with this interpretation,[406] but some do argue for this crown's exclusivity for those who persevere under extremely difficult circumstances,[407] and many still call upon the larger NT theme of Christians' crowns to link

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[405] Horrell and Williams, "Community," 2:538.

[406] E.g., Douglas J. Moo, "Commentary: 2. Trials and Christian Maturity (1:2-18): D. The Reward for Persevering in Trials (1:12)," in *James: An Introduction and Commentary*, eds. Eckhard J. Schnabel and Nicholas Perrin, Revised ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 16: 18, ProQuest Ebook Central; Ralph P. Martin, "James: Text and Commentary: II. Enduring Trials (1:2-19a): 3. Testing: Its Source and Mischief—and Rationale (1:12-19a)," in *James*, eds. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and Ralph P. Martin, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 48:258 of 695, Hoopla Digital Ebooks; Peter H. Davids, "Commentary: II. Opening Statement 1:2-27: 2. Second Segment: Testing, Speech, Generosity 1:12-25: a. Testing Produces Blessedness 1:12-18," in *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, eds. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 120 of 226, Hoopla Digital Ebooks; Martin Dibeliust, "The Letter to James: 1:2-18: A Series of Sayings Concerning Temptations," in *James: A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, eds. Helmut Koester and Heinrich Greeven, trans. Michael A. Williams, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1975) 89, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvb6v80w; Blomberg, "Degrees of Reward?" 164.

[407] E.g., Grant R. Osborne, "1:1-18: Testing and Temptation: James Clarifies the Relationship between Trials and God (1:12-15): The Reward for Passing the Test (1:12)," in *James: Verse by Verse*, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 31, ProQuest Ebook Central.

James' words to the arsenal of supposed 'reward' passages.[408] A brief exegesis reveals this verse as having nothing to do with rewards, as it simply describes the role of trials in sanctification and validating one's faith as genuine.

James' epistle, penned most likely by Jesus' brother from his post in Jerusalem,[409] stands among the catholic epistles, in that it addresses no specific historical church but rather speaks to Christians at large.[410] The first verse greets "the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad," which implicates an audience of Jewish Christians in particular, referring to the Jews' centuries-earlier postexilic dispersion across the region. The overall 'Jewishness' of the letter corroborates this conclusion,[411] but the phrase "twelve tribes" had evolved to generally include eschatologically redeemed Israel (cf. Matt. 19:28; Rev. 7:4-8, 21:12), so a broad address to all Christians (both Jew and Gentile) is also possible.[412] Regardless of the exact ethnic makeup of James' recipients, the letter appears to speak to Christians experiencing poverty and poor social treatment (possibly persecution?) (cf. 2:6-7; 5:4-6), and James intends to exhort these believers to persevere (1:2-4,

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[408] E.g., Vernon D. Doerksen, "Growing through Testings (1:1-12): The Endurance of Trials Brings the Crown of Life, 1:12," in *James*, Everyday Bible Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1983), 20, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[409] Conservative scholars debate the authorship of James, specifically concerning *which* James wrote the epistle. The NT mentions several Jameses (e.g., James the son of Zebedee, an early disciple of Jesus [Mark 1:19], James the son of Alphaeus [Mark 15:40], James the father of Judas [Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13], etc.), but James the brother of Jesus (Acts 12:17, 15:13, 21:18; Gal. 1:19, 2:9) stands as the most probable writer due to his leadership prominence in the Jerusalem church and the corresponding Jewishness of the letter (see above), the letter's range of date and James' date of death (mid-first-century), and the early Christianity's traditional stance on the epistle's author (Moo, "Introduction: 2. Authorship," 16:xxxv-xxxvii; Moo, "Introduction: 3. Circumstances of the Letter," 16:l-li; Martin, "Introduction: James in the New Testament," in *James*, 48:131-132, 141 of 695; Davids, "Introduction: I. Authorship and Date," in *James*, 48, 53, 59 of 226; Dibeliust, "Introduction: 2. The Author of the Letter of James," 11-12.

[410] Moo, "Introduction: 1. The Letter in the Church," 16:xxxi.

[411] Besides the use of "twelve tribes" in 1:1, see, for example, the discussion of the law in 1:25, 2:8, and 4:11-12, and the use of συναγωγὴν ("synagogue" or "assembly") in describing the church in 2:2, and the many OT references (e.g., 2:8-11, 21-23; 4:5-7; 5:11, 17-18) (Moo, "Circumstances of the Letter," 16:xlvii; Davids, "Introduction: I. Authorship and Date: 4. Internal Evidence," in *James*, 53 of 226).

[412] Moo, "Circumstances of the Letter," 16:xlviii-xlix.

12; 5:7-11), forsake worldly philosophies and pleasures (1:5-8, 22-27; 2:1-4; 3:1-12; 3:13-4:3), and outwardly practice their faith through good works (2:13-26), all despite their increasingly difficult circumstances.[413]

Situating 1:12 within the epistle's literary structure is admittedly difficult; no consensus exists as to the letter's topical organization.[414] Further, the epistle's overall arrangement appears haphazard, apparently "lack[ing] continuity in thought,"[415] ranging from themes of earthly riches (1:9-11; 5:1-6), faith and works (2:14-26), and the Christian life as the end draws near (5:7-11), just to name a few. This jumping from topic to topic is nowhere as evident as in the first chapter, where James opens with a brief discussion on endurance through trial producing spiritual maturity (vv. 2-4), moves to the necessity of confidence in God (vv. 5-8), pivots to the upside-down economy of the Kingdom (vv. 9-11), returns to endurance in trial (v. 12), describes the human-caused progression of sin to death versus God's good provision (vv. 13-18), and closes with an exhortation to *do* the heard Word (vv. 19-27). Some see verse twelve as a hinge between the two halves of the chapter,[416] yet others see it as the peak statement in a larger discussion (1:2-18) on developing spiritual maturity through various trials.[417] As mentioned above, the exact flow of thought, especially within this first chapter, is difficult to discern, leaving most commentators

[413] Moo, "Circumstances of the Letter," 16:xlvii-xlviii; Dibeliust, "Author," 2; Dibeliust, "Introduction: 7. The Circumstances of the Origin of the Letter of James," 43.

[414] Moo, "Introduction: 4. The Nature of the Letter," 16:lvi; Martin, "Introduction: 6. Structure and Outline of the Letter," in *James*, 48:207 of 695.

[415] Dibeliust, "Author," 2.

[416] E.g., Martin, "Structure and Outline," in *James*, 48:207 of 695; Moo, "Commentary: Trials and Christian Maturity (1:-2-18): E. Trials and Temptations (1:13-18)," 16:19.

[417] E.g., Moo, "Trials and Christian Maturity," 16:lxxx.

to only speculate on how these subsections tied together in the author's mind.[418] The only clear connection within the first three subsections (vv. 2-4, 5-8, and 9-11) involved what Dibeliust calls a "catchword link," between verses 2-4 and 5-8: the repetition of "lack" in verses 4-5 (λειπόμενοι in v. 4; λείπεται in v. 5; both from λείπω) loop these otherwise seemingly random topics together.[419] This fast-paced weaving in and out of different subjects significantly complicates building a contextual framework for the verse in question, which is muddled even farther with the epistle's broad and unspecific audience.[420] Consequently, the exegesis of verse twelve will be dependent on James' other statements on perseverance, specifically on the proximal verses 2-4.

The whole of verses 2-12 seems to center on developing spiritual maturity,[421] where verses 2-4 and 12 speak on this issue in the context of enduring difficult circumstances. In essence, verses 2-4 explain the eternal value of living through hardships: trials create the opportunity for faith to solidify and mature, ultimately pushing the believer to become more and more sanctified.[422] "Trials" (πειρασμοῖς) can refer to internal temptation or tough external conditions, yet the qualification "various" (ποικίλοις, v. 2) suggests including both these

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[418] E.g., Moo, "Trials and Christian Maturity," 16:lxxx; Dibeliust, "Introduction: 1. The Literary Genre of the Letter of James," 2, 5; cf. Davids' critical approach to the structure of James ("Introduction: II. Form and Structure," in *James*, 60 of 226).

[419] Martin, "James: Text and Commentary: II. Enduring Trials (1:2-19a): 1. Trials, Wisdom, Faith (1:2-8)," in *James*, 48:235, 241 of 695; Davids, "Commentary: II. Opening Statement 1:2-27: 1. First Segment: Testing, Wisdom, Wealth 1:2-11: b. Wisdom Comes Through Prayer 1:5-8," in *James*, 112 of 226; Dibeliust, "A Series of Sayings," 70, 77.

[420] Commentators often isolate verse twelve as its own section, unrelated to any of the surrounding verses (e.g., Dibeliust, "A Series of Sayings," 88; "Commentary: Trials and Christian Maturity (1:-2-18): D. The Reward for Persevering in Trials (1:12)," 16:16-17).

[421] Moo, "Trials and Christian Maturity," 16:lxxx.

[422] Martin, "Trials, Wisdom, Faith," in *James*, 48:238 of 695; Davids, "Commentary: II. Opening Statement 1:2-27: 1. First Segment: Testing, Wisdom, Wealth 1:2-11: a. Testing Produces Joy 1:2-4," in *James*, 109 of 226; Dibeliust, "A Series of Sayings," 73-74.

definitions.[423] The use of δοκίμιον ("testing," v. 3) prompts the image of refining metal with fire (cf. Ps. 12:6 LXX; Prov. 27:21 LXX); when a faithful person endures the fires of life, he will emerge more purified (i.e., sanctified)—that is, trials will strengthen genuine faith (cf. 1 Pet. 1:7).[424] The production of "endurance" (ὑπομονήν, v. 3), therefore, signifies a steadfast devotion to God despite temptation, isolation, persecution, etc. (cf. Luke 8:15; Rom. 5:3-4; 2 Thess. 1:3-4; Rev. 2:3) that marks the genuine believer.[425] Therefore, the original call to "consider it all joy" refers to the grateful attitude Christians should have in approaching difficult situations with the knowledge that such difficulties will contribute to the perfecting of their faith that will be completed upon Christ's return (1 Thess. 5:23; Phil. 1:6).[426] Verse twelve then picks up this discussion, rendering verses 2-4 as a foundation to interpret the "crown of life."[427]

Verse twelve takes on the format of a beatitude (cf. Matt. 5:3-12)[428] to explicate the result of faithful perseverance, but it does so by using the same terminology from verses 2-4. After pushing through the "trials" (πειρασμοῖς, v. 2; πειρασμόν, v. 12) of earthly life, developing "endurance" (ὑπομονήν, v. 3) and the ability to "persevere" (ὑπομένει, v.12), the believer will stand "approved" (δόκιμος, v. 12) before the Lord having passed the "testing" (δοκίμιον, v. 3) of

[423] This is further supported by the implied social ostracization of James audience (external factors) and the proceeding discussion on temptation (1:13-18; internal factors) (Moo, "Commentary: Trials and Christian Maturity (1:-2-18): A. Letting Trials Accomplish Their Purpose (1:2-4)," 16:3; Martin, "Trials, Wisdom, Faith," in *James,* 48:238 of 695).

[424] Moo, "Letting Trials Accomplish Their Purpose," 16:3; Martin, "Trials, Wisdom, Faith," in *James,* 48:237-238 of 695; Davids, "Testing Produces Joy," in *James*, 109 of 226; Dibeliust, "A Series of Sayings," 72.

[425] Moo, "Letting Trials Accomplish Their Purpose," 16:3.

[426] Davids, "Wisdom Comes Through Prayer," in *James,* 111 of 226.

[427] Moo, "Persevering in Trials," 16:16-17; Martin, "Testing," in *James*, 254 of 695; Dibeliust, "A Series of Sayings," 87.

[428] Dibeliust, "A Series of Sayings," 88.

his faith.[429] Based on the context of verses of 2-4, the Lord's bestowal of the "crown of life" does not come as a reward for steadfast devotion during trials but rather as evidence of genuine faith. Authentic trust in Christ will not be threatened by earthly trials; true faith will endure. With "those who love Him (God)," "endurance to the end is assumed as self-evident."[430] This is the essence of being "approved" (δόκιμος; cf. 2 Cor. 10:18; 2 Tim. 2:15), that one's devotion to Christ does not crumple under difficulty but is actually *strengthened*, ultimately confirming the believer's faith as true by his "willingness to suffer for the cause of Christ."[431] In contrast with the "double-minded" who have doubts about God (vv. 6-8), "those who love [God]" (v. 12) with a singular focus will grow in sanctification and steadfastness when enduring hardship.[432]

As the Christian comes out of their trial-ridden life "perfect and complete" (v. 4) through their steadfast love for the Lord, Christ will give him the "crown of life" (v. 12). The majority of scholars recognize that the genitive here, like the other "crown" passages discussed above, is epexegetical ("the crown that is life").[433] The Greek phrase τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς ("the crown of life") places an article (τῆς) before ζωῆς ("of life"), literally rendering the phrase "the crown that is the life." In other words, after having their faith perfected and their spirit sanctified through trials, Christ will give believers *the* utmost life—that is, life eternal through himself.[434] The qualification of this crown being given to "those who love [God]" (v. 12) clearly delineates

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[429] Moo, "Persevering in Trials," 16:16-17; Martin, "Testing," in *James*, 255 of 695; Dibeliust, "A Series of Sayings," 87.

[430] Dibeliust, "A Series of Sayings," 89.

[431] Moo, "Persevering in Trials," 16:18; Davids, "Testing Produces Blessedness," in *James*, 119-120 of 226.

[432] Martin, "Testing," in *James*, 258 of 695.

[433] E.g., Moo, "Persevering in Trials," 16:18; Martin, "Testing," in *James*, 258 of 695; Davids, "Testing Produces Blessedness," in *James*, 120 of 226; Blomberg, "Degrees of Reward?" 164.

[434] Martin, "Testing," in *James*, 258 of 695.

this "crown" as a universal gift to all believers and not a specific reward for the particularly steadfast, but more significantly, this verse describes the eternal value of earthly hardship, in that it solidifies the believer's faith and allows him to grow in sanctification.[435]

Conclusion on the Five Crowns

Particularly within popular theology and decently prevalent in biblical scholarship is the idea of Christians receiving different "crowns" at the final judgement for different godly attributes demonstrated in their earthly walk of faith. This understanding finds superficial support in a few NT verses, but upon exegeting these passages within their historical and literary contexts, the "crown" imagery used by the NT writers plainly depicts the believer's salvation and gift of eternal life through Christ. The "imperishable wreath" of 1 Corinthians 9:24-26a has Paul exhorting the Corinthians to diligence and endurance in their faith so that they all may attain joint spiritual victory in Christ. In 1 Thessalonians 2:19, the Thessalonians themselves will serve as Paul's "crown of pride" before Christ, in that the Thessalonians' perseverance will prove Paul's faithful apostleship so that both he *and* the Thessalonians may stand before Christ in complete confidence. As Paul nears his execution and offers a final message to Timothy, he concludes his last letter by reflecting on his life of extraordinary ministry work with gladness

[435] "The crown of life" (τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς) also occurs in Revelation 2:10 with an identical meaning. In the midst of the seven letters to the seven churches (1:20-3:22), the angel speaks on Christ's behalf to the church of Smyrna to warn them of coming trials initiated by Satan (2:8-11). Those in Smyrna will similarly be tested by these difficulties and, upon remaining faithful through these difficulties, Christ will give to them "the crown of life" (v. 10) and they "will not be hurt by the second death" (i.e., receive eternal life) (G. K. Beale, "Commentary: 2:1-3:22: The Letters to the Seven Churches: Christ Encourages the Churches to Witness, Warns Them Against Compromise, and Exhorts Them to Hear and to Overcome Compromise in Order to Inherit Eternal Life: Christ Commends the Church of Smyrna for Enduring Tribulation and Encourages It to Continue to Be Faithful in Anticipation of More Imminent, More Severe Persecution, in Order to Inherit Eternal Life and Heavenly Kingdom (2:8-11)," in *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, eds. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 260, ProQuest Ebook Central; David E. Aune, "II. John's Vision and Commission (1:9-3:22): B. Proclamations to the Seven Churches (2:1-3:22): 2. The Proclamation to Smyrna (2:8-11)," in *Revelation 1-5*, eds. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and Ralph P. Martin, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 52A:628-629 of 2320, Hoopla Digital Ebooks).

that he can say with certainty that he will receive the "crown of righteousness" (2 Tim. 4:8)—that he has lived for the gospel and will be among the righteous. Peter then picks up on this crown motif, calling elders to pastor their congregations well so they, along with the rest of their church, may receive the "crown of glory" (1 Pet. 5:4) by living out their faith and fulfilling their Kingdom assignment. Finally, James calls his readers to perseverance under trial with unwavering love for Christ so they may become perfected in their faith and ultimately gain "the crown of (eternal) life" (Jas. 1:12; cf. Rev. 2:10). This notion of Christians aiming to collect various crowns for certain spiritual developments cannot be biblically supported, for the cited verses simply illustrate a faith vindicated before the Lord with a life well-lived for the gospel.

V. Conclusion

This final section will briefly reiterate the key takeaways from each chapter, reflect on the theological significance of this project's conclusions, and suggest avenues for future areas of exegetical study in the broader topic of merit and reward in biblical Christianity.

Primary Ideas and Conclusions

The introductory chapter sought to establish the issue of merited heavenly rewards, its historical-theological development, and the overall purpose and approach of this manuscript. Despite the universal acceptance of believers' inability to contribute anything to their salvation (i.e., solely won by Christ on the cross), numerous NT passages are often used to support the idea of *earned* heavenly rewards that will be given *in addition* to one's salvation. This understanding conformed perfectly with the modern, Western values of individualism and meritocracy, leading to its broad endorsement, not only in popular theology but also in biblical and theological academia. However, on the face of this idea stands several problems concerning logic and its motivational dangers (e.g., how rewards fit into the prospect of heaven's perfection, the seeming incentivization of working for selfish gain rather than love of God, etc.). The origins and development of works-rewards theology throughout Church history were detailed, showing that the idea itself began with the early Church elevating virgins and martyrs to a special heavenly status, slowly expanded to all individual believers as the Middle Ages heavily explored the afterlife, and split the Reformers into different camps as a consensus could not be reached on the subject. The modern era, nonetheless, sees this 'salvation by grace, rewards by works' theology nearly as a default position with near-universal agreement. The vast majority of contemporary scholars and theologians subscribe to this understanding with very few questioning its biblical validity. No critique of this theology has yet done so with the goal of

thoroughly exegeting the specific, oft-cited texts; the critical methodology thus far has been primarily from a theological-philosophical vantage point or has superficially exegeted a wide variety of passages. Subsequently, the aim of this thesis was to take exhaustively exegete the most commonly referenced texts in support of works-rewards theology to determine whether these passages truly affirm merit-based, differential heavenly rewards for Christians.

First examined was Paul's building metaphor in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 which, upon first glance, reads as a clear statement that some believers ("saved … through fire") "will suffer loss" on the day of judgement while others "will receive a reward" (vv. 14-15). The historical, cultural, and literary contexts establish this passage as Paul's response to the Corinthians' developing factionalism and favoritism for certain teachers, arguing that true wisdom and Kingdom growth come from God alone (3:5-9). However, in verses 10-15, Paul caveats this truth by reiterating the weighty responsibility of faithful teaching rooted in Christ. In doing so, the apostle uses language and imagery heavily reminiscent of Solomon's Temple and OT passages speaking of Yahweh coming to his eschatological temple in fiery refinement to rid it of those not genuinely devoted to him. Further, when the Greek phrases used in verses 14-15 are studied elsewhere both within and outside of Scripture, it becomes clear that ζημιωθήσεται ("he will suffer loss"), σωθήσεται ("he will be saved"), and διὰ πυρός ("through fire") refer to unbelievers who will come under divine judgement. In other words, this future purification of the "temple" (i.e., the Church) will delineate whose 'buildings' were constructed in a way worthy of Christ's foundation (i.e., made of indestructible materials that would withstand judgement) and whose easily consumable piles of hay and straw expose their nonexistent faith. Thus, Paul's distinction is not *between* individual believers based on their works, but between those conformed with

Christ to eternal life and the unredeemed who will be preserved in eternal judgement (cf. vv. 16-17).

The third chapter shifted to Jesus' parable of the minas, found in Luke's gospel (19:11-27), a passage whose typical interpretation rests on the themes of godly stewardship, accountability, and future reward. However, when exegeted according to its historical and literary framework, the lessons on properly utilizing one's gifts and resources fades into the background and are replaced by intersecting storylines of the Jews rejecting Christ's Kingship (19:12, 14, 27) and the true definition of citizenship under Christ's reign (19:13, 15-26). Jesus tells this parable right before his entrance into Jerusalem for Passover (19:1; 22:1)—with his followers (and Luke's readers) knowing full well of the eschatological relationship between Passover, the prophesied Messiah, and the Holy City—to dismantle the expectation of an immediate, physical, fully-fledged establishment of the Kingdom upon Jesus' arrival into Jerusalem (19: 11). Further, the parable's king simultaneously represents Christ *and* alludes to the historical and notorious reign of Archelaus over Judea: just as the Jews vehemently opposed Archelaus' reign, so they also would with Jesus' Kingship. This first storyline of a king hated by his own people not only dramatically subverts the typical Jewish beliefs regarding their Messiah and his Kingdom, but it also significantly builds Luke's overall theme of the Jews rejecting Christ alongside the inclusion of the Gentiles (e.g., 6:6-11; 11:37-54; 16:14-15). The second parabolic narrative, depicted by the king's servants' and their compliance with his business commands in his absence (19:13, 15-26), similarly continues the Lukan motif of true Kingdom citizenship manifested in one's complete obedience and loyalty to the King (17:20-19:27). In contrast, those proving themselves apathetic and unfaithful will ultimately be marked as an enemy (19:20-27). Altogether, this parable's teaching on the Jews' disavowal of the Messiah and

the necessity of living out one's love for Christ in unwavering submission and fidelity to him leaves negligible room to focus on the miniscule detail of two servants receiving unequal numbers of cities. While the possibility of Jesus alluding to a proportional rewards system cannot be totally ruled out, the parable clearly intends to emphasize the Jews' rejection of Jesus and the broader dichotomy between those ruled by Christ and those opposed to him.

The final chapter addresses the frequent image of believers' "crowns" throughout the NT, as these passages are often read as indicative of a works-rewards relationship (i.e., believers can earn these crowns apart from their salvation). In the middle of his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul discusses Christian freedoms and living intentionally for the gospel (1 Cor. 8:1-9:22), but he then shifts to how this gospel-centered lifestyle engenders perseverance and assurance of salvation (1 Cor. 9:23-10:13). As the apostle envisions this joint victory with the Corinthians, he likens this building up of spiritual endurance to an athlete with unwavering discipline looking towards his victory wreath (1 Cor. 9: 23-27); however, as Paul explains, those in Christ live "for the sake of the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:23b) as a reflection of their faith and look forward to the "imperishable" crown—that is, salvation itself (1 Cor. 9:25). Paul uses a similar picture of joint spiritual victory in his first letter to the newly founded Thessalonian church: in the wake of persecution (1 Thess. 2:14-16), Paul encourages the Thessalonians to continue in their faith and endure, for their perseverance in the gospel will confirm his own faithful apostleship and allow him to stand confidently before Christ when he returns (1 Thess. 2:17-20)—they will serve as his "crown of pride" on that final day (1 Thess. 2:19). The last Pauline use of crown imagery appears in his final letter as the apostle anticipates his execution, contentedly reflects on his life of ministry, and exhorts Timothy to continue boldly preaching the gospel even if it comes with rejection, persecution, and suffering (2 Tim. 3:1-4:8), knowing that the "crown of righteousness"

(i.e., Christ's perfect righteousness given in salvation and subsequent glorification) awaits "all who have loved [the Lord's] appearing" (i.e., all believers), including Paul himself (2 Tim. 4:8). The bestowal of this righteousness is *not* a merited reward for fruitful Kingdom work but is simply an eschatological justification of the believer before the righteous Judge (2 Tim. 4:8); it is a confirmation of the Christian's faith as evidenced by their endurance and steadfastness in the gospel. Peter similarly picks up this image of a victor's crown in his first letter to several persecuted churches in northwestern Asia Minor (1 Pet. 1:1, 6): in his advice on how to live and view the hostility and oppression directed toward them (1 Pet. 4:12-5:11), Peter specifically addresses church elders and exhorts them to serve as Christ did, oversee the "flock" with as Christ's earthly representatives, and joyfully identify with Christ in suffering because, in doing so, they will also identify with him in future glorification when he returns ("you will receive the unfading crown of glory," or "crown that is glory;" 1 Pet. 5:1-5). This initially reads as an award reserved only for faithful elders, but this passage's focus on church leadership and the epistle's other statements on believers' "glory" as a result of their identical identification with Christ (e.g., 1:7-8, 20-21; 4:13-14; 5:1, 10) indicates that this "crown of glory" signifies a *universal* promise of eschatological glorification for all whose faith is validated through their active devotion to Christ. Lastly, James' catholic letter to opens with a brief discussion on developing spiritual maturity (Jas. 1:2-18), with verses 1:2-4 and 1:12 exhorting James' audience to joyfully endure trials so their faith may be strengthened and "approved", knowing that their faithful perseverance in Christ amidst hardship will secure them the "crown of life" (i.e., the crown that *is* life, specifically *eternal* life) that will be graciously given to all "those who love [Christ]." In short, the NT does not use this "crown" imagery to represent potential earned rewards for believers;

rather, this language depicts the universal, spiritual victory revealed in the salvation, glorification, and eternal life won by Christ.

Recommendations for Further Study

As discussed in the Introduction, this manuscript sought to fill a methodological gap in this area of research, namely that the relevant texts would be extensively exegeted and investigated according to their contextual frameworks. While the major NT passages were examined, there are several other, less-often cited NT texts[436] that sometimes appear in the conversation on earned heavenly rewards and would be fertile ground for further exegetical research. In the same vein, the OT similarly has a running motif between obedience to Yahweh and his blessings (e.g., Deut. 11:26-28, 28:1-12) that would contribute significantly to this broad subject of works-rewards theology based on the biblical text. Altogether, this manuscript only took a small portion of all the passages pertinent to this area, and additional study into OT and NT texts would continue to illuminate whether this widespread theology has significant biblical support.

Theological Significance

This manuscript has demonstrated that the major passages typically used to support differential and proportional heavenly rewards for believers' earthly works—when exegeted according to their historical, cultural, and literary contexts, simply reflect the biblical dichotomy between those who will be saved unto eternal life in Christ versus those who will face divine judgement as a result of their lack of faith. This is not to say that works-rewards theology is completely undefendable in Scripture; rather, *these specific texts* do not lend significant credence

[436] These would include the Matthean language of those "least" and "greatest in the Kingdom" (5:19, 11:11, 18:4), the phrase of being "repaid according to deeds" (Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:8; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 2:23, 22:12), and the implications of receiving a "full reward" in 2 John 8.

to a future hierarchy of glorified Christians in heaven according to their works. While more exegetically based research is needed on other OT and NT 'reward' passages (see below), the conclusions of this study conform well with the broader Christian philosophies of salvific grace totally apart from works (Rom. 3:28; Eph. 2:8-9; Gal. 2:16), the credit of salvation given to Christ alone (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom. 3:23-24), and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit prompting believers to good works (1 Cor. 2:1-5; Phil. 2:12-13; Tit. 3:4-6). How can sinful, imperfect Christians add *anything* to the perfect and complete work of Christ? God owes the redeemed *nothing* for their works; *it is the saved who owe him everything*—believers ought not expect payment for Kingdom work, for devotion, for obedience, when *he* is the one who graciously and mercifully accepted *wretched sinners* into *his* Kingdom. *He* gives the opportunities for good works (Eph. 2:10), *he* calls believers to them (1 Cor. 15:58; Tit. 2:7, 14; Jas. 2:14-26), *he* leads them in these good works (1 Cor. 2:1-5; 2 Cor. 9:8), and *he* is sovereign over their impact (1 Cor. 3:5-9). Those in Christ ought to be eternally grateful and utterly astonished that the Creator, Savior, and King would want *them* to labor as his vessels of good news. Such work should be motivated by thanksgiving and eagerness out of love for God and what he has done (John 14:21; Rom. 5:8; 1 John 5:3)—not incentivized by the selfish prospect additional reward on top of the already-marvelous salvation. This study will end echoing the wisdom of French Reformer Amyraut (1664) on this very issue:

> Nevertheless it is not my intention to determine any thing concerning it in this place, and it is much more to the purpose to be exercised in embracing the Cross of Christ, by which we alone have right to partake with him in the inheritance of the Heavens, than to busie our selves in computing our good actions, or measuring the degree of our virtues, that one day in the highest Heavens we may see, if our Rewards be proportionable unto them."[437]

[437] Moïse Amyraut, "Concerning the Happiness of Believers after the Resurrection: The Fourth Discourse," in *The Evidence of Things Not Seen, Or, Diverse Scriptural and Philosophical Discourses Concerning the State of Good and Holy Men After Death*, trans. a Minister of the Church of England (London, UK: Tho. Cockerill at the Sign of the Three Legs, in the Poulty, 1700), 219, Early English Books Online,

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