

FIVE MINUTES WITH TOM MOOTY

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"REWARDS"

I supposed we all have attended some form of rewards banquet or celebration; whether graduation exercises, some distinguished honor granted by a governmental, religious, athletic, or civil agency.

"Miss 'Nita" and I were the proud parents of three children; who gave us six grandchildren to enjoy; and we loved to go see them being honored.

That's a lot of graduations to attend - no matter what level had been reached. It is only natural; and in many cases, well deserved. Long lists of special awards were read, diplomas were presented, tassels were relocated and the obligatory yucky spray stuff and beach balls were tossed.

The New Testament promises faithful Believers that they will receive rewards in recognition of their faithful service and spiritual growth. These rewards will honor the achievements and works of Believers and must not be confused with salvation, which is a free gift of God not based on works or human merit.

The evaluation of the Believers' lives after salvation is called the "Judgment Seat of Christ" in 2 Corinthians 5:10; and occurs in Heaven after the rapture of the church, during the seven-year "Tribulation" on earth. At this judgment, the Believer's works, deeds, and actions are judged; but not the Believer himself. Since it must be noted that the

Believer is already in heaven when this judgment occurs; it can be clearly seen that the issue is not salvation, but rewards. The purpose of this evaluation of church-age Believers is to reward faithful service and to purify and prepare the Church, the Bride of Christ, to rule and reign with our Lord in the millennial kingdom.

At this judgment, each Believer will be recompensed for the deeds done while he was alive and after he became a Christian. The word translated "recompense" entails earning or gaining back something that is due or that which is earned, remuneration for work done, or that which has been earned through one's actions. Since salvation is a free gift based from God (Romans 3:24; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5), these "rewards" must relate to achievement in the spiritual life after one has been saved.

Since this judgment is for Believers only; it naturally follows that some Believers will have spiritual production worthy of recognition and honor, and others will not. In the everyday living, the Christian will produce a variety of deeds, some done in the physical (Galatians 5:16, 19) and others done in the spiritual (Galatians 5:22-23). At the Judgment Seat of Christ, these deeds will be evaluated. The metaphor is of a refining process in which fire purifies the deeds by burning off the dross; and after the impurities are burned off, the Believer is rewarded for that which remains. He will then hear the Lord say, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 15:21).

However, the dire warning is that some Believers will not have rewardable service. Their efforts were marred by self-serving motivation, selfish ambition, or failure to even serve the Lord. These Believers will suffer loss of rewards but will not lose their eternal salvation (1 Corinthians 3:15).

The apostle Paul communicated the gravity of the Believer's future evaluation through the metaphor of winning the prize in athletic games (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). Greek culture valued the sacrifice and dedication of the athlete.

The Corinthians were well acquainted with the rigors and standards of the games. Every seven years one of the four Pan-Hellenic athletic events, the Isthmian Games, was held seven miles from Corinth at Isthmia. Rules and discipline were strictly enforced. If an athlete violated his diet or training regimen in any way, he was disqualified and could not compete in the games. For the Believer, disqualification does not mean loss of salvation, but loss of rewards (2 Timothy 2:5).

At the conclusion of the contest the victors were awarded the prize by the judge, who sat on the judgment bench. Each of the different locations had its own award wreaths woven from various plants: wild olive at Olympia, fresh wild celery at Nernea, and laurel at Delphi. But at Corinth, an already withered celery wreath was used; and those athletes trained a lifetime to win that prize. Paul (who might have been an athlete in his college days) uses this to contrast the self-discipline of the athlete working for a perishable wreath with the Believer who is pursuing an imperishable crown.

How are you doing with your Christian walk? Got any awards awaiting you in heaven? You know, it does matter how you live after you become a Christian!

As always, I am indebted to many writers and speakers to which I have been exposed through the years; but I must point out an excellent book: "The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy", edited by

Tim LaHaye and Ed Hinson; and an article written by Robert Dean as the source of much of this information.

Tom Mooty has served the West End Baptist Church as its Supply Pastor, Interim Pastor, Pastor, Senior Pastor, and Very Senior Pastor and is pleased and privileged to write these columns for the Wednesday and Weekend Editions of the Newport Plain Talk. Mooty appreciates any comments you may send to P.O. Box 851 in Newport; or tommooty15@gmail.com.