

The Gift and the Prize

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One time I asked a Bible study group in the church where I ministered if they knew the difference between a “gift” and a “prize.” The majority were immediately certain that they knew. I had them turn in their Bibles to Romans 6:23 where it speaks of the “gift” of God which is eternal life, and then Philippians 3:14 where we read of the “prize” of the high calling. Then I asked if they thought the two passages were referring to the same thing. They looked a little puzzled. Evidently such a thought had never occurred to most of them. Why should it? Most Christians have read the Bible so long through rose-colored glasses of traditional theology, that it is difficult for them to take the simple meaning of words and apply them correctly.

In 2 Timothy 2:15, Paul admonishes us to “be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” But how does one “rightly divide” the Word of Truth? The Greek word *orthotomeo* means “to cut straight” (divide), and as Paul is speaking of a good workman, he must be thinking of some work in which the workman's skill consists in cutting straight; perhaps his own trade, in which it was all important to cut the pieces straight that were afterwards to be joined together to make a tent. To “rightly divide the word of truth” means, at least in part, to properly “cut straight,” divide or distinguish between the various portions of Divine Truth that they might be fit together into one harmonious whole.

Does it make sense to call salvation, or eternal life, both a gift and a prize? Does it not make better sense to “rightly divide” the two, and by diligent study, show by many Scriptures that there is a “prize” to be won as well as a “gift” to be received? And thus instead of making God's Word contradict itself, fit each portion of truth into its proper place in the Divine scheme of things and produce one harmonious whole.

If we are to “rightly divide” the word of Truth, we must distinguish between salvation, as such, which is the gift of God, and the “high calling” which is something to be attained to. This is brought out by Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:24, where he uses the same Greek word translated “prize” as we find in Philippians 3:14. He shows it to be like the prize won in the games or athletic contests of the time. “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.” In the same chapter, Paul indicates his own apprehension of failure to obtain this prize: “Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.” (1 Corinthians 9:26-27) How different are these words than those of the Apostle which we read in 2 Timothy 1:12: “For I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.”

In one instance we have apprehension and in the other certitude. Should we not “rightly divide” these Scriptures and realize that in the latter words Paul was speaking of his certainty of salvation (eternal life), whereas in the former he realizes there is something

else which he had not yet attained, and which would require all the energies and devotion of his life. Hear his words: "...if by any means I may **attain** to the resurrection from (out from among) the dead. **Not** that I have already obtained, or am already perfect; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself yet to apprehended: but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forward to the things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the **prize** of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:11-14

The prize which Paul is so eager to attain is referred to in the above passage as the "upward call." The Greek word translated "upward" may also be translated "above" or "high." Thus the "high calling" is a summons or invitation to come up higher. This is in harmony with the statement in Hebrews 3:1: "Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the **heavenly calling.**" It is a call or summons to attain to the glories of heaven itself. All of us who have been saved are partakers of (associates in) this heavenly calling. But - we must "be even more diligent to make your call and election sure" (2 Pet. 1:10). Certainly this is not the same as the GIFT of eternal life which is now the present possession of every born again Christian. The distinction is made clear in 2 Timothy 1:9 where Paul speaks of God who "saved us and called us with a holy calling." The two ideas would not be separated by the conjunction "and" if they were one and the same. Paul, in Romans 11:29, speaks of the gifts and the callings of God, indicating that they are not the same.

NOW the picture comes into focus. Obviously, if "heaven" is a PRIZE to be won, then the GIFT of eternal life must provide only for restored life on the same plane on which it was lost - the EARTHLY! Adam was on earth, not in heaven, when he forfeited deathless life. The PRIZE involves being "joint heirs" with Christ and His own (heavenly) realm, to rule and reign with Him over the earth (Rom. 8:17; Rev. 5:10, 20:6). Those who fail to make this "calling" must come back to earth in the coming Kingdom age to live in deathless physical bodies. The fact that many saved ones are now in that realm called "paradise" in no way indicates that they will be a part of that coming "Heavenly Kingdom" as "co-heirs and co-rulers" with Christ. Paradise is an intermediate state of bliss for departed souls who have been saved, but it is in no way synonymous with the glories of the coming Kingdom of Christ where those who have overcome will rule and reign with Him. Resurrected life back to this earth is to be the lot of many saved ones until they have fully entered into all that has been ordained for them. Then at some future date they shall be translated into the Heavenly realms, and they will operate no longer in a physical but in a glorified body.

We have seen from three different Scriptures that the **prize** is a high calling, a holy calling and a heavenly calling. Let us examine these thoughts a little further. We know that the word "high" indicates that which is lofty or elevated. Thus, in type, the high calling would be symbolized by the top or summit of a mountain which rises above the ground level. Moses, on the top of Mount Sinai, would typify the high calling. The word "high" also means "difficult to comprehend," "of a great price," or "greater price than usual." Thus the "high calling" is not for easy going, indulgent Christians. A price must be paid! Paul knew well the price: a total renunciation of the things of the world. Hear his words: "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and

count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from (out from among) the dead.” Philippians 3:7-11

Paul is referring to the “first resurrection” of those who will “reign with Him” (Rev. 20:6). The word “high” also means “elevated in rank, condition or office.” Those who attain unto the high calling are to receive positions of authority and rank far above those who enter the earthly kingdom. As a matter of fact they are to rule over the earthly kingdom. “Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.” Revelation 20:6 Of the Apostles, Jesus said, “You shall sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt. 19:28). According to Revelation 5:10, those to be made priests and kings shall reign on (over) the earth. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:2-3, “Do you not know that the saints will judge **the** world? Do you not know that we shall judge angels?” Thus those of the “high calling” are elevated even above angels!

The calling is not only high, it is also holy (2 Tim. 1:9). “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14). Holiness means separation in spirit from the things of the world. The Israelites, delivered from Egypt and on their way to Canaan, typify the Christians of this age who have been delivered from the pollutions of this world and are on their way to the Heavenly Kingdom. God gave the Israelites numerous and detailed laws to teach them holiness (separation) from that which defiles and makes “unclean.” Most of these laws are found in Leviticus, where repeatedly God said, “You shall be holy, for I am holy” (Lev. 11:44, and etc.). “I am the Lord your God, who has separated you from the peoples” (Lev. 20:24). “Now all these things happened to them as examples (types), and they were written for our admonition” (1 Cor. 10:11). “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean and I will receive you” (2 Cor. 6:17). “But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all conduct, because it is written, Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:15).

The church, which is to become the bride of Christ, is to be presented to Him a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; “but that it should be **holy and without blemish**” (Eph. 5:27). Certainly most Christians have not yet attained to this kind of holiness!

The calling is also a “heavenly” calling. “Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling” (Heb. 3:1). The **prize** of the high calling is Heaven itself; or we might say the “Heavenly Kingdom” or realm which is being prepared for those who love Him with all of their hearts and souls, and who are being perfected into His likeness. Since “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 15:50), it becomes evident that those who enter therein are to be clothed with bodies commensurate with the Heavenly realm. Paul says, “For our citizenship is in heaven; from which we also we wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall **transform** our lowly body that it may be **conformed to His glorious body.**” Philippians 3:20-21

We read in 1 Corinthians 15:40 that there are celestial (heavenly) bodies, and bodies terrestrial (earthly), and that the two differ in glory. Paul also uses the terms “natural” bodies and “spiritual” bodies (1 Cor. 15:44-48). “Natural” bodies are for the earth, and “spiritual”

bodies are for the heavens. The New Testament repeatedly speaks of this entrance into the Heavenly realm as being “glorified,” or entering into “glory,” “if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together” (Rom. 8:17). This, of course, indicates an adornment and beautification far surpassing that of the earthly glory. It is that “glory” with which Christ Himself was adorned after the resurrection and transformation of His earthly body. “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to **enter into** glory?” (Lk. 24:26). Those who are to be glorified with Him are to become like Him. “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it is not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that, when He is revealed, we **shall be like Him**, for we shall see Him as He is.” 1 John 3:2 Surely, it staggers our imagination to realize just how high, holy and heavenly this calling is.

Though this prize is something to be attained to, we must not harbor the idea that it is something achieved through our own effort or merit alone. It is “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). It is the power of His Spirit dwelling within that enables one to overcome the world, even as He overcame the world and entered into glory. **He** now lives to make intercession for us (Rom. 8:26-27). Only those who have allowed the Lord, by His Spirit, to do a perfect (complete) work in them (Phil. 1:6) can hope to be “joint heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17) in His own (heavenly) realm. How many have been lulled into the lethargy and slumber of the “foolish virgins” because the Word was not “rightly divided” to them; and they thought all there was to do was to believe, be baptized, and live a fairly respectable life, and a mansion in Heaven was awaiting them.

“For many are called but few are chosen” (Matt. 22:14). I used to think that this meant only a few would be saved and the rest eternally lost. I now realize that many saved ones are called to “His own kingdom and glory,” (1 Thess. 2:12) but few give diligence to “...**make their call and election sure** ...” (2 Pet. 1:10). Shall we not “rightly divide” the Word of truth? We need to live in the joy and assurance of our salvation, but we also need to press on toward the “prize of the high calling.” “Therefore He says, Awake you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light” (Eph. 5:14).

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