

THE PASTORAL EPISTLES: GOD'S DIRECTIVES FOR HIS UNDERSHEPHERDS

III. II Timothy: Church Ministry Amid Hardship

L. God's Crowns Of Reward For His Servants

(2 Timothy 4:6-8 et al.)

I. Introduction

- A. We increasingly hear of the departure of pastors from expounding Scripture and a waning spiritual vitality in churches. In such a time, pastors and teachers can easily be tempted to reduce or cease their ministry efforts.
- B. However, 2 Timothy 4:6-8 and other passages encourage God's servants to keep striving in ministry as there are eternal crowns of reward from God for spiritual victory in ministry, so we view them for our edification:

II. God's Crowns Of Reward For His Servants, 2 Timothy 4:6-8 et al.

- A. God encourages His servants to strive for an incorruptible crown by disciplining themselves to avoid sins that would disqualify them from fulfilling the Lord's ministry calling, 1 Corinthians 9:19-27:
 - 1. The "incorruptible crown" of 1 Corinthians 9:25 that Paul aimed to gain from the Lord was to be achieved by Paul's disciplining himself to avoid certain actions that might lead him into temptation to sin in such a way that he would thereby disqualify himself for completing his ministry assignment, 1 Cor. 9:26-27.
 - 2. Such sins would include immorality, substance abuse or embezzling, actions that though forgivable by the Lord nevertheless permanently ruin one's reputation before others for the ministry, cf. 1 Timothy 3:2a.
- B. God encourages His servants to strive for a crown of joy for leading others to Christ, Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19:
 - 1. In writing both to the Philippian believers and to the believers at Thessalonica, Paul called them his joy and crown, both groups of believers having been led to faith in Christ by Paul, cf. Acts 16:11-40; 17:1-10.
 - 2. Of note, Paul had suffered beating and imprisonment at Philippi for his labors there and slander and a city uprising at Thessalonica for his ministry there (Acts 16:22-24; 17:5-10).
 - 3. Nevertheless, Paul's reward for leading these folk to Christ under persecution pressure was a crown of joy.
- C. God encourages His servants to strive for a crown of righteousness for loving Christ's appearing and thus demonstrating it in faithfully serving Him regardless of trials in their ministries, 2 Timothy 4:6-8:
 - 1. Paul wrote that he would receive a crown of righteousness for his faithfulness in ministry to the death.
 - 2. However, this crown was available for all who loved the Lord's appearing and thus who like Paul had shouldered sufferings and wrongs in staying faithful to their callings throughout their ministries.
- D. God encourages His servants to strive for a crown of life for overcoming the temptation to sin, James 1:12.
- E. God encourages His servants who lead to strive for a crown of glory for leading Biblically, 1 Peter 5:1-4 NIV:
 - 1. Peter charged the elders of local churches to shepherd God's people in four important ways, 1 Peter 5:1-3:
 - a. Elders were to assume the responsibility to serve as overseers of God's people, 1 Peter 5:1-2a. Though the responsibility of assuming spiritual oversight of a body of believers is a huge responsibility before God, the Lord nevertheless wants church elders to assume that responsibility as a calling and to fulfill it.
 - b. Elders were to assume this responsibility not because they must, but to do so willingly, 1 Peter 5:2b. Overseeing believers who are carnal or immature is no easy task -- it is often painful and frustrating, but God wants overseers to see the task as necessary out of love for God and His people and willingly lead.
 - c. Elders were to shepherd God's people not out of greed for money, but out of eagerness to serve, 1 Peter 5:2c. Ministry can often involve financial hardship, but God wants His overseers to look beyond this temporal life and focus on the eternal value of their work, not making money a high priority in this life.
 - d. Elders were not to function like dictators, lording it over God's people, but to lead by the influence of an overwhelmingly godly example, 1 Peter 5:3. Overseers can be tempted to control people by putting guilt trips on them or by humiliating them before the rest of the congregation, but God wants overseers instead not to lord it over His people, but to lead gently and powerfully by means of their sterling example.
 - 2. For functioning this way, elders of local churches would receive the crown of glory from Jesus Christ, the Chief Shepherd of His people, a crown that would never fade away, 1 Peter 5:4.

Lesson: *God names five crowns in Scripture that His servants in the Church era might win for serving Him well -- an incorruptible crown for avoiding temptations to sin that might disqualify them from service, a crown of joy for leading others to Christ, a crown of righteousness for faithfully serving the Lord out of love for His appearing, a crown of life for overcoming temptation and a crown of glory for leading God's people Biblically.*

Application: *May all believers who serve Christ strive to please Him in their callings so as to win these crowns.*