

• *Inheritance – God's reward*

One of the major themes of the whole Bible is reward or (to use the Bible's technical term 'inheritance'). The words 'reward' or 'inheritance' never refer to justification; inheritance is *through* justification (as Romans 4:13 says). Nor is 'going to heaven' the inheritance. Once we are 'saved' (that is, justified, re-born, adopted as God's children) we are lined up to 'inherit' the promises of God upon our lives by persistence in faith. Consider Hebrews 6:12. By faith and persistence in works of faith we inherit the promises of God. What is 'the promise'? It includes the various callings God puts upon us (think of the different ministries the people of Hebrews 11 were called to). It includes enablement and provision. It includes entering into rest – the point in this life when some or much or all of our life's work is achieved. It includes reward in heaven, honour from Jesus, visible glory in a resurrected body, a share in the new heavens and new earth in which righteousness is to be found.

• *The promises of God – our calling, enablement, provision and entering into rest*

• *Justification cannot be lost but inheritance can*

Can salvation be lost? If you mean, 'Can justification-newbirth-adoption be lost?' I answer: no! Can the inheritance of reward (the phrase Paul uses in Colossians 3:24) be lost? I answer: it is possible. There can be a fiery judgement in which any unworthy work is burned up and as a result we suffer loss. The warnings of Scripture are never about justification-newbirth-adoption. They are always about the results of our works, good or bad. To gain our full reward we need endurance and persistence in faith. This is the point Hebrews is pressing upon us. ³⁶*You have need of endurance so that after you have done the will of God you may receive the promise.* You might ask: what is it like to be the person of 1 Corinthians 3:15 – in heaven but unrewarded? I answer: we do not know and we do not need to know!

• *This is the reason for the warnings and encouragements of Hebrews*

Jesus comes to us when we need him

Jesus comes to us when we need him. Our writer encourages us to press on and actually lay hold of the promises that God has for us. The Lord Jesus Christ will come to our aid when we need him. ³⁷*For in a very, very short time, the One who is coming will come and will not delay,* ³⁸*but my righteous one will live by faith, and if he draws back, my soul will not be pleased with him.* ³⁹*But we are not among those who shrink back and so destroy their lives but we are those who have faith and so reach the soul's possession.*

• *Anticipation of the second coming*

Is this a reference to the second coming? Yes – but we need to remember that the second coming can be anticipated. In one way or another it is **always** true that 'the day of the Lord is near upon all the nations' and this relates to reward, 'As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds – good and bad – shall return on your own head'¹. The second coming is a model of all the sudden interventions in our lives in which God chastises us or rewards us. At any moment Jesus can say, 'Well done'. If the second coming does not **actually** come very soon, something will come in its place which has much the same effect. God likes giving promises and then sending anticipations of those promises. This is why something can seem to be promised **immediately** and yet at the same time be a long way ahead. Either the thing itself will come or an equivalent. Whichever way it happens Jesus will come to us very, very soon. The words here are emphatic. 'Yet a little, little time...', says our writer. Jesus will come to you in reward or judgement sooner than you think!

• *Jesus will come to us very soon one way or the other*

We are to live by faith

We live by faith. Jesus will come in one way or another, very soon. God's righteous people are to 'live by faith'. This means that we **gain life** by our trusting God. Faith leads to energy, boldness, persistence.

God does not like it if we fall into unbelief

God does not like it if we fall into unbelief. Even true believers can fail to apply their faith. ‘Where is your faith?’ – Jesus can ask us^{□1}. It is not that we have ceased to be believers altogether, but our faith can seem to disappear in the midst of certain crises. But God wants us to persist in faith no matter what may be happening to us. If we draw back God will not be pleased with us.

□1 see Luke 8:25

Unbelief is very destructive

Unbelief is very destructive. Basically the Christian is a believer. Our writer says: ³⁹*But we are not among those who shrink back and so destroy their lives but we are those who have faith and so reach the soul’s possession.* We are born again. We have faith in our hearts. Jesus prays that our faith will not fail. We are people of whom it is said, ‘We are not among those who shrink back’. If it does happen it is out of character. It is going against what God has done for us and within us. We have the Holy Spirit; we have heard God’s voice. There is no reason why we should become unbelieving. It is extremely offensive to God when we neglect what he has put within us. It destroys our lives. I do not think this necessarily means that in such a case the ‘backslider’ goes to eternal punishment. There are plenty of places in the New Testament – and even within Hebrews – where we are promised an indestructible redemption. And yet unbelief does ruin our lives! We cease to hear God’s voice. We become spiritually deaf. Our ministry is taken away from us. God rejects us from our ministry – as he ‘rejected Saul from being king’ (but it never says he rejected Saul himself!). Our basic character is this: we are those who have faith and so reach the soul’s possession^{□1}. We reach our reward. Even the thought that we might lose our reward is weird and grotesque. Only extreme rebellion prevents us from receiving our reward now and in eternity. Yet it is that extreme rebellion that our writer is anxious to prevent. Some had indeed abandoned the fellowship^{□2} and had become totally hard and unreachable. It was impossible to help them or bring them back to the place of repentance. But there is no need for it to happen to us. We simply have to stay open to God’s voice, persist in the works of faith that God puts before us, and we shall one day hear Jesus say, ‘Well done’. It might be sooner than we think. And it can happen before we die as well as at the judgement throne of Christ. It seems that some get to heaven ‘by the skin of their teeth’. But we can do much better than that! If we persist in faith our heavenly Melchizedek will come to us with provision and refreshment when we need him, and we shall reach the soul’s possession – the everlasting inheritance in glory.

□1 10:39

□2 10:25

- “Shrinking back” is unnecessary and offensive to God
- Cease hearing God’s voice
- Ministry withdrawn and rejected
- It is that extreme rebellion that our writer is anxious to prevent
- Some had become totally hard and unreachable
- But there is no need for it to happen to us



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