

Question: “Will there be degrees of reward in heaven and degrees of punishment in hell?”

Answer:

The apostle Paul made it clear that the crown of life promised to him is given to all who truly follow Christ and not the doctrines of men. “Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2Ti 4:1-8).

In the parable of the workers in the vineyard, those who entered into service for the landowner late in the day received the very same reward as the ones who were first to arrive (Mt 20:1-16). The first to work “supposed that they would receive more,” but they did not. The landowner informed them, “Friend...is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things?”

Christians are joint-heirs with Christ (Ro 8:17). They are promised, one day, to enter His joy (Mt 25:21). Therefore, whatever is the joy of the Lord Jesus Christ will be the joy of His disciples at the end of time. No one will live in a bigger mansion or on a more beautiful street in glory (Jn 14:1-3 Re 21:21).

Much of the confusion over degrees of punishment stems these words of Jesus. “And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more” (Lk 12:47-48).

The preceding passage, rather than teaching degrees of punishment, actually teaches a stricter judgment (Js 3:1). When we all stand before God on the final day, some will be judged very harshly. Jesus explained by saying, “for everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more” (Lk 12:48). You see, with greater knowledge and privilege come greater responsibility, and when responsibilities are taken lightly, God’s judgment is unyielding.

Jesus said it would be more tolerable in the Day of Judgment for Sodom, than for the people who rejected His deity and refused His counsel as He lived among men on the earth (Mt 11:20-24). The severity to which Jesus refers is “in the day of judgment.” Sadly, though, everyone who remains in their sins, whether knowingly or unknowingly, is destined for the same unpleasant eternal habitation (Re 20:15).

Jesus said the residents of Heaven will be together in the same place, and those in hell will have common surroundings. “And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom (the Jews who rejected Jesus, bj) will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt 8:11-12).

It is simply illogical to conceive of two sinners in torment arguing over “who had it worse,” or two saints in Heaven envious of each other’s mansion. Any doctrine maintaining degrees of reward and punishment is not well thought-out.

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