

Probe Survey Report #4: Witnessing to Your Faith and the Response

Steve Cable continues to explore Probe's 2020 survey on religious beliefs and practices, examining how people witness to their faith or not, and reasons for both sharing and for not trusting Christ.

1. How Often Do You Witness to Your Faith?

Let's consider the topic of witnessing or sharing your faith with others. In our 2020 survey we asked two questions about this topic. The first question was: *How often do you engage in intentional spiritual conversation with non-believers about your faith with a desire to see them accept it for themselves?* With this question, we wanted to avoid casual mentions of your faith and discussions with no intent at conversion. The results as shown in the chart below are surprising.

Among Americans ages 18 through 39 who profess an affiliation with some religion, we find that less than 1 out of 5 (20%) of them strongly disagree with the statement that Muhammad, Buddha and Jesus all taught valid ways to God. Yet at the same time almost 6 out of 10 (60%) of them state that they share their faith with an unbeliever at least once a year with the intent of converting them to their belief.

So the majority of American believers (of any faith) must believe that at least for some people with different religious beliefs, it would be better for them to turn from their current belief and accept the tenets of my faith. They want to do this even though they believe that there are multiple ways to God not beyond just their faith.

Looking at the detailed results, all religions except the Unaffiliated showed very similar results: over 20% (1 in 5) of those witnessed at least monthly and about half witnessed at least yearly. So, it would appear that there is a lot of witnessing going on with very few conversions.

Figure 1 Witness with a Desire to See Conversion

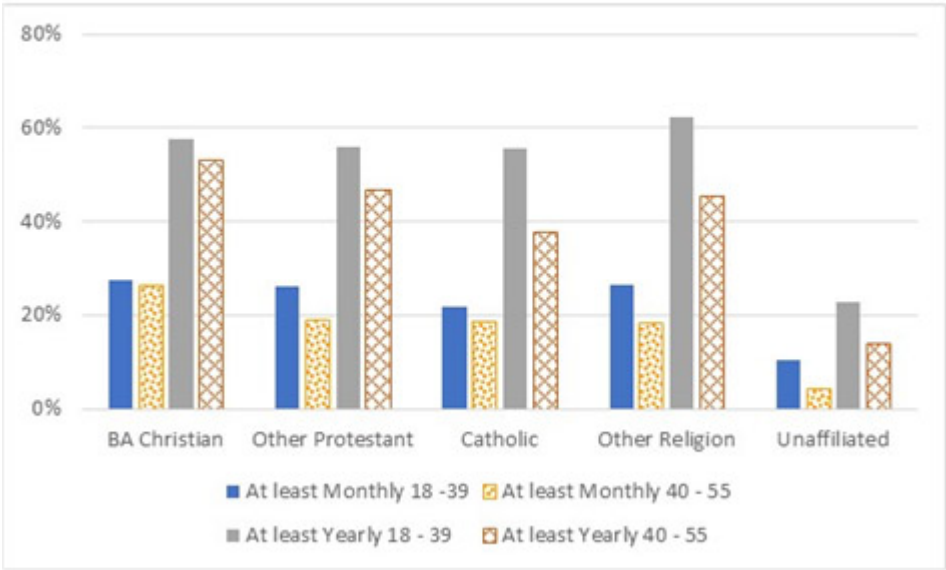


Table 1 below shows several estimates as to how many people are the recipients of these “*intentional spiritual conversations*” in a given year. The different levels shown are based on different assumptions as to how often they share with the same person and how many people they share with in a year consistent with the responses to the survey. More details are provided in the endnotes.

Table 1 Potential

Number of People Shared with by American Adults Ages 18 through 55

Religious Affiliation of Person Sharing with Intent to Convert	Potential number of individuals shared with in one year		
	Low estimate (millions){1}	Nominal estimate (millions){2}	High estimate (millions){3}
Born Again Protestant	27	56	118

Other Protestant	24	50	106
Catholic	25	51	108
Other Religion	15	31	65
Unaffiliated	12	25	52
Total	103	212	449

These results amazed me. If the nominal estimate was truly happening almost 60% of the population would have someone attempting to convert them every year. This topic deserves additional related questions to determine what level of sharing with the intent of conversion is actually happening in America. It may be that most people answering this question are only sharing with one or two family members such as their teenage children or a sibling. Or perhaps, many people think they would do this, but really they do not.

What makes this especially surprising is that Other Protestants and Catholics have a lot more people witnessing than they have holding a Basic Biblical Worldview or actually being involved in their religion. While only about one in ten (10%) strongly disagree with the statement that Mohammed, Buddha and Jesus all taught valid ways to God, over half (50%) of them are sharing their faith with the intent to convert at least once a year. And, one in five (20%) are sharing monthly or more. If you think that there are multiple ways to heaven, why would you want to go out of your way to convert someone to your religion. Of course, you could be sharing with an Unaffiliated person who needs to choose a valid religion.

Only 4.6% of Other Protestants and 0.7% of Catholics have a Basic Biblical Worldview, but almost half of them say they intentionally witness to their faith at least yearly. When they engage in a conversation with the intent of having this other person accept their faith for themselves, WHAT IS THIS FAITH THEY ARE TRYING TO GET THE OTHER PERSON TO ACCEPT? These results do suggest that most people desire more people to

think like them when it comes to religion.

In a similar vein, less than 1 in 10 (10%) Catholics and Other Protestants say they pray daily, attend church at least monthly, read the Bible weekly and say their faith is important in their daily life. So, the question remains, "What are they witnessing to???"

In contrast, only 29% of Born Again Christians have a Basic Biblical Worldview while well over half of them report intentional witnessing at least once a year. But at least BAC's have something to witness to. Those Born Again Christians with a Basic Biblical Worldview report that almost two thirds (63%) of them share their faith at least once a year. This level is only a few percentage points higher than that for Born Again Christians as a whole.

How Should We Respond?

If the number of people sharing their faith is actually consistent with the answers to this question, then we know that the percentage of people actually converting as a result of their witness is very small. Otherwise, we would have many people toggling back and forth between different professed religions.

Among Born Again Christians, we project they are sharing their faith with between 25 million and 100 million nonbelievers. However, they are sharing ineffectively with the number being shared with far exceeding the growth rate of evangelicals in America. So, pastors and parachurch organizations need to up their game in training their people to share the good news of Christ. BAC's need to understand and practice the following:

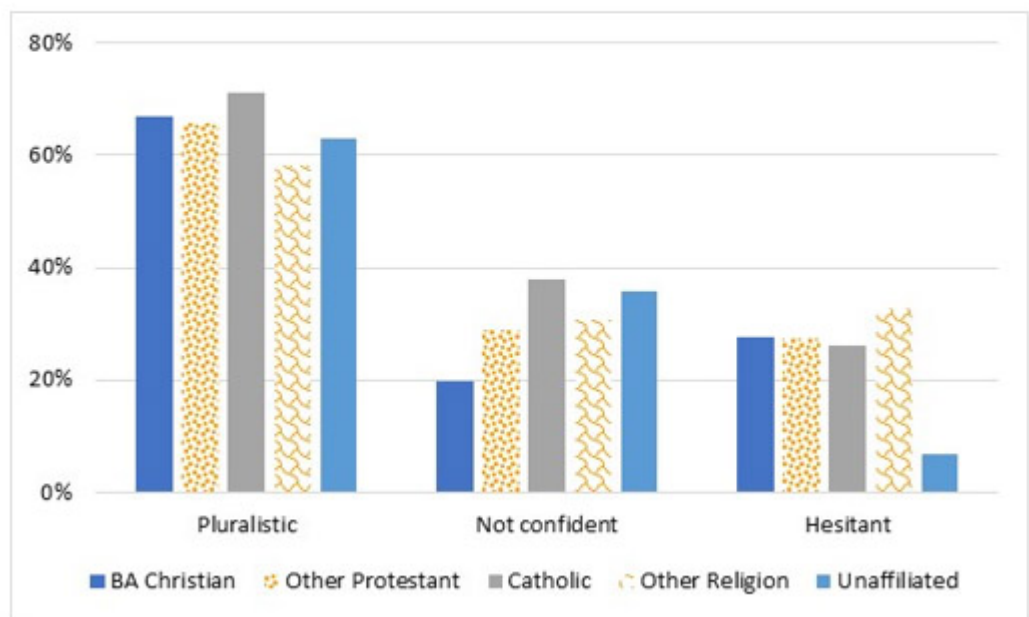
1. Bathe their unsaved acquaintances in prayer asking God to bring to a clear feeling of need
2. Recognize their call to effectively share the gospel looking for opportunities to share

3. Understand how to build bridges spanning the gaps of understanding for those with different worldviews
4. Clearly explain the wonderful gift purchased for us through Jesus' death and resurrection
5. Unapologetically ask for a response to the good news shared with others
6. Realize that they should not be discouraged by a lack of interest or the lack of a positive response

2. What Keeps You From Communicating Your Religious Belief?

We also asked the question: "When I refrain from communicating my religious belief with someone, it's usually because:"[4](#)

*Figure 2 Reason for Refraining from Witnessing
Americans 18 through 39*



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1. They can get to heaven through their different religious belief. [Pluralism]
2. We shouldn't impose our ideas on others. [Pluralism]
3. The Bible tells us not to judge others. [Pluralism]
4. It just doesn't seem to be that important and I don't want to risk alienating them. [Not confident]
5. I'm not confident enough in what I believe. [Not confident]
6. I'm waiting for a better opportunity. [Hesitant]

For the chart in Figure 2, we grouped these responses into three sets:

- **Pluralism** – There are other ways besides my way and I don't need to impose my way on others (responses 1, 2 and 3)
- **Not confident** – Not confident that what I have to share is important to them and/or not confident that what I believe is true (responses 4 and 5)
- **Hesitant** – No rush, I can probably find a better time (response 6)

As seen in the chart, the level of respondents selecting each set of reasons for refraining are consistent across all religious beliefs. At first glance, this may seem surprising. But in a culture where pluralism is a dominant part of all religious groups, it begins to make sense. And the pluralistic reasons were dominant, attracting around two thirds of the population across all religious groupings.

For Born Again Christians, lack of confidence in what they believe is less of an issue than for other groups. And we see that the Unaffiliated are much less likely to be hesitant waiting for a better time at around 5% of all Unaffiliated. But note that most of the other groups had less than 25% say that they were hesitant.

Looking at both of the charts, we see that (even with a lot of people saying they sometimes used excuses to avoid the subject) a majority of people of any religious group (not including the unaffiliated) share with someone with a desire to recruit them at least once a year. I would suspect that most of these people are sharing with a family member or close friend. However, we did not ask the question so that is only reasonable speculation.

How Should We Respond?

If you are a church leader or a person who desires to see Christians sharing the good news of Jesus with those who need

to know, how should you respond to this data on self-identified barriers to sharing with others?

On the most common reasons (which indicate a belief that other people don't really need to know about salvation through faith in Jesus), we need to make the exclusive role of Jesus Christ in any hope of salvation a recurring and prominent theme in our teaching. This is not a topic to tiptoe gingerly around. Rather, we need to boldly proclaim, "There is salvation in no other name under heaven other than the name of Jesus Christ." God would not have planned from before the beginning of time to sacrifice himself on the cross for our salvation if there were any other means to reconcile sinful men and women to Himself. God will not force reconciliation on us. We can choose to reject His grace. But as Paul tells us in Romans, "How are they to believe in one they have not heard of?" If we think we can slough off our responsibility to tell others, we do not understand the grace of God and our role as citizens of heaven living on this earth.

For those who do not feel confident in their ability, we need to provide training and practice environments for them to learn to share their faith experience. You are telling someone about the most important element of your life; the process that brought you out of death into true life. Help prepare them and put them in a position to share the good news with a mentor alongside them.

3. Why Have You Not Believed In Salvation Through Jesus Christ?

Finally, we wanted to know why people have not accepted the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. This is really a question on the other side of witnessing. I am including it here, but it could easily be a separate topic.

The question asked was as follows: *What keeps you from believing that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ alone?*

The following options were given to select from:

1. Don't believe that God would take upon Himself the penalty for my sin.
2. Salvation is not a gift, it must be earned.
3. I am clearly as good as Christians I know so I should be accepted by God if they are.
4. There is no personal, creator God.
5. Another answer not listed here.
6. Never gave the question any thought.
7. Not applicable, I do believe.

The table below captures the range of answers to this question.

Ages 18 – 39					
	Born Again Protestant	Other Protestant	Catholic	Other Religion	Unaffiliated
Don't believe that God would take the penalty for my sin	4.1%	13.7%	16.3%	10.6%	5.9%
Salvation is not a gift, it must be earned	15.7%	20.1%	23.8%	22.0%	8.0%
I am clearly as good as Christians I know	11.9%	10.6%	16.2%	12.9%	8.1%
There is no personal, creator God	1.0%	2.8%	2.7%	5.8%	23.9%
Another answer not listed here	6.9%	9.9%	9.3%	21.9%	28.2%
Never gave the question any thought	15.0%	29.7%	16.3%	12.7%	13.5%
Not applicable, I do believe	45.4%	13.3%	15.5%	14.1%	12.5%

The first thing to notice in this table is that less than half of Born Again Protestants selected "Not applicable, I do believe." This result is odd since one of the questions

required to be considered a Born Again Protestant is “The statement that best describes you own belief about what will happen to you after you die is ‘*I will go to heaven because I confessed my sins and accepted Jesus Christ as my savior.*’” Perhaps some of the Born Again thought we wanted to know what was keeping them away before they surrendered to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Perhaps this is because some of them consider “confessed my sins and accepted” as something they did to earn their salvation. In that case, one could possibly consider answers 2, 5, 6 and 7 as consistent with Born Again Protestants. Although that would be somewhat of a stretch. That assumption still leaves 17% of BA Protestants whose answers are clearly inconsistent.

Other Protestants are most likely to say, “I never gave the question any thought” or “Salvation must be earned” with only 13% saying they do believe the statement about salvation through faith alone. Catholics are about the same as Other Protestants in saying they believe in salvation through faith alone. The more frequent answers for Catholics being “it must be earned”, “I am clearly as good as Christians I know”, and “never gave the question any thought.”

The most common answer from the Unaffiliated is “another answer not listed here” followed by “there is no personal, creator God”. Those who claim that most “nothing in particulars” are really Christians find little support in that only one in five (20%) say that they do believe in salvation through faith in Jesus.

4. Christianity and Other Major World Religions

One of the things that drives our attitude toward and our approach to witnessing to our faith is how we think Christianity relates to other world religions. In part 2 of this series, we looked at some questions that dealt with

believing that multiple religions could offer a workable road to an eternity with God. In this part we will look at what people believe distinguishes Christianity from other world religions if in fact anything does.

We asked our respondents the following question: *"How does Christianity relate to other major world religions?"* The respondents selected from the following choices:

1. Serves the same function with only minor differences
2. Focuses on living after the example of Jesus Christ
3. Teaches that reconciliation with God is a gift of God accessed by faith not by works
4. Promotes love for other people more deeply than other religions
5. Differs based on misconceptions about God and/or history
6. Not sure how it relates

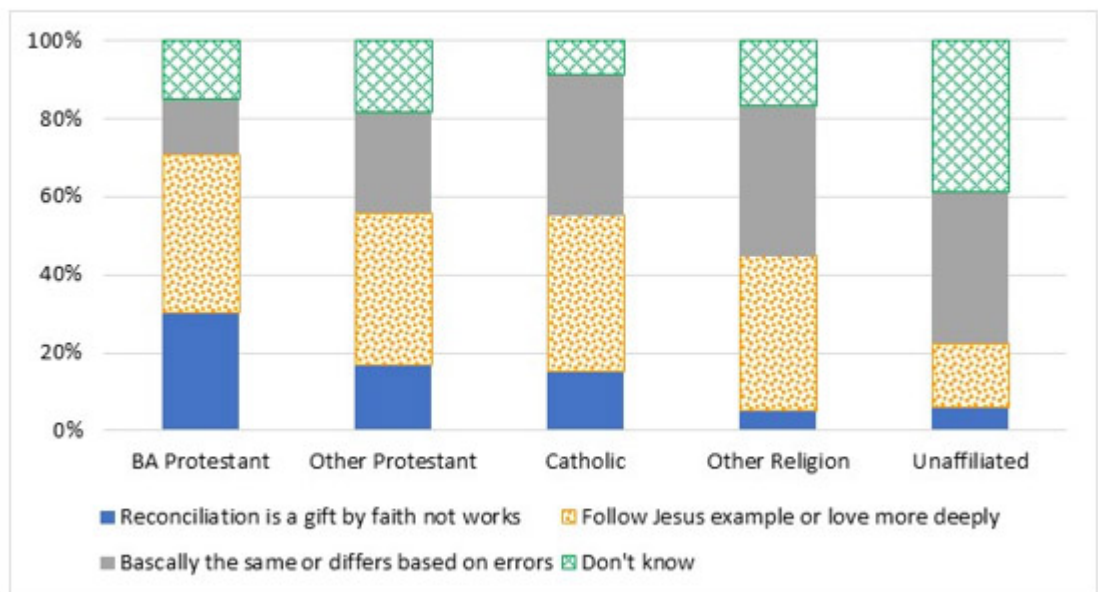
Note that answers 1, 5 and 6 indicate an ignorance about the tenets of Christianity and/or the tenets of other major world religions. As noted earlier, Christianity teaches a way to reconciliation that is very different from other world religions and is not compatible with the reconciliation stories of those other religions.

Answers two and four reflect potential differences between Christianity and other world religions. We do want to follow Christ's example and other world religions would not teach us to do that. Other religions could not promote loving other people more deeply that Christianity does, but some of them might argue that they also promote love for others.

Teaching that reconciliation is a gift of God accessed by faith alone not through works is the greatest substantial difference between Christianity and other world religions. This teaching is significantly different than the teachings of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and others.

The results are charted in the graph to the right. First, notice the interesting result

*Figure 3 How Does Christianity Relate to Other Religions
Ages 18 - 39*



that only about 30% of Born Again Protestants selected 'reconciliation is a gift' while 40% selected following Jesus' example or love others more deeply. As noted above, this second answer is not inconsistent with the concepts of Christianity but is not as fundamental as the first. However, selecting this answer over reconciliation is a gift' is consistent with what we saw earlier: 70% of Born Again Christians are not exclusivists.[\[5\]](#)

Other Protestants and Catholics have less than one in five that selected 'reconciliation is a gift' and the total selecting answers 1 and 2 is slightly over one half. Thus, almost half of them selected answers showing ignorance of or disbelief in the basic tenets of Christianity.

The results for the Unaffiliated shows their total disregard for salvation by grace and any substantial difference between Christianity and other religions.

5. Summary of Key Results

Among Americans ages 18 through 39 who profess an affiliation with some religion, we find that less than 1 out of 5 (20%) of them strongly disagree with the statement that Muhammad,

Buddha and Jesus all taught valid ways to God. Yet at the same time almost 6 out of 10 (60%) of them state that they share their faith with an unbeliever at least once a year with the intent of converting them to their belief.

So the majority of American believers (of any faith) must believe that at least for some people with different religious beliefs, it would be better for them to turn from their current belief and accept the tenets of my faith. They want to do this even though they believe that there are multiple ways to God beyond just their faith.

We also discovered that Born Again Christians are not really more likely than other religious groups to share their faith with the purpose to convert. Born Again Christians with a Biblical Worldview are only marginally more likely to share with the purpose to convert at least yearly as Born Again Christians as a whole (63% vs. 57%).

Amazingly, one could project that nominally about 212 million Americans a year would be the recipients of these spiritual conversations with the intent to convert. However, if almost all of these

conversations were with the same person it might represent as few as 34 million Americans which could be primarily the children and relatives of the person sharing their faith. We cannot know for sure without asking more questions.

Conversely, when asked what makes them refrain from sharing their faith, almost 70% of Born Again Christians selected a reason that indicated they believed that the other person did not really need to know; a universalist belief where all religious beliefs lead to heaven.

About one out of seven (14%) of adults under age 40 who **are not** Born Again Protestants believe that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ alone. This small number is true for Other Protestants, Catholics and Other Religions. This same group of

religious affiliates has about 1 in 3 who believe that salvation is a result of good works and is earned or rewarded on a curving scale.

Less than one in three, Born Again Christians selected the redeeming work of God through faith as the key difference between Christianity and other religions. And less than one in five Other Protestants and Catholics selected that answer. Instead, about three out of four (75%) selected love deeply, obey Jesus or Christianity is basically the same as the message of other religions.

Notes

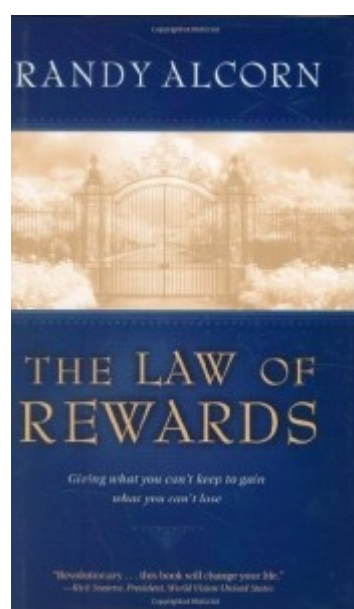
1. Low Estimate: Calculated assuming that those sharing at least monthly on the average shared their faith 12 times per year and those sharing at least yearly but less than monthly shared on the average 1 times per year AND that they shared on the average with the same individual four times.
2. Nominal Estimate: Calculated assuming that those sharing at least monthly on the average shared their faith 18 times per year and those sharing at least yearly but less than monthly shared on the average 2 times per year AND that they shared on the average with the same individual three times.
3. High Estimate: Calculated assuming that those sharing at least monthly on the average shared their faith 24 times per year and those sharing at least yearly but less than monthly shared on the average 4 times per year AND that they shared on the average with the same individual two times.
4. Although most people selected only one answer, on this question they could select multiple answers
5. Exclusivists are those who believe that their religion is the only source of correct teaching concerning our relationship with God. When I get time, I will check out the relationship between those who are exclusivists and those who selected 'reconciliation is a gift'

The Law of Rewards

Dr. Michael Gleghorn explore the biblical doctrine of eternal rewards. The Bible promises believers heavenly rewards for earthly obedience.

Introducing the Law of Rewards

The hit movie *Gladiator* begins with a powerful scene. Just before engaging the German barbarians in battle, General Maximus addresses some of his Roman soldiers. "Brothers," he says, "what we do in life echoes in eternity." Although Maximus was a pagan, his statement is entirely consistent with biblical Christianity, particularly the Bible's teaching on eternal rewards.



In *The Law of Rewards*, [\[1\]](#) Randy Alcorn writes: "While our faith determines our eternal destination, our behavior determines our eternal rewards" [\[2\]](#). The Bible clearly teaches that we are saved by God's grace, through personal faith in Christ, apart from any works whatever (Eph. 2:8-9). But it also teaches, with equal clarity, that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that we may be recompensed for what we have done in the body, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10). This judgment (which is

only for believers) is not to determine whether or not we are saved. Its purpose is to evaluate our works and determine whether we shall receive, or lose, eternal rewards (1 Cor. 3:10-15).

Alcorn writes, “Our works are what we have done with our resources—time, energy, talents, money, possessions.”^{3} The apostle Paul describes our works as a building project. At the judgment seat of Christ the quality of our work will be tested with fire. If we have used quality building materials (gold, silver, precious stones), then our work will endure and we will be rewarded by the Lord. If we have used poor building materials (in this case, wood, hay, or straw), then our work will be consumed and we will suffer the loss of rewards (1 Cor. 3:10-15).

This raises some important questions. What are we doing with the resources that God has entrusted to us? Are we seeking to build God’s kingdom, in God’s way, empowered by God’s Spirit? Or are we merely engaged in empire-building for our own glory? Are we investing our resources in reaching the world for Christ, making disciples, and helping the poor and needy? Or are we only concerned with satisfying our own immediate wants and desires?

It’s here that the worldview dimensions of our subject can be most clearly seen. Most of us would probably find it difficult to use our resources in the service of God or our fellow man if we thought that this life was all there is and that death is the end of our personal existence. But Christianity says that there’s more – a *lot* more. And if Christianity is true, then Maximus was right: “What we do in life echoes in eternity.” Randy Alcorn has observed, “The missing ingredient in the lives of countless Christians today is *motivation*. . . . The doctrine of eternal rewards for our obedience is the neglected key to unlocking our motivation.”^{4}

Questioning Our Motivation

Is the desire for eternal rewards a proper or legitimate motivation for serving Christ? Isn’t it somewhat shallow, maybe even selfish, for our service to Christ to be motivated

by a desire for heavenly rewards? Furthermore, shouldn't we serve Christ simply because of who He is, rather than for what we can get out of it? To some people, the promise of eternal rewards sounds like a crass appeal to our baser instincts. But is it?

Before we jump to any unwarranted conclusions and possibly overstate the case, we may first want to take a step back, take a deep breath, and remind ourselves of a few things. In the first place, as Randy Alcorn observes, "it wasn't *our* idea that God would reward us. It was *his* idea!"[\[5\]](#) If we search the pages of the New Testament, we repeatedly find promises of heavenly rewards for earthly obedience. Indeed, Jesus himself urges our obedience in light of future rewards (Luke 6:35). Not only that, in Matthew 6:20 he *commands* us to store up for ourselves "treasures in heaven." Now this leads to an interesting little twist. In John 14:21 Jesus says, "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me." We *could* make the argument, then, that the one who does *not* seek to store up treasures in heaven is being disobedient to Christ's command and demonstrating a lack of love for him!

In a somewhat similar vein, Alcorn wrote:

It is certainly true that desire for reward should not be our only motivation. But it is also true that it's a fully legitimate motive encouraged by God. In fact, the two most basic things we can believe about God are first that he exists, and second that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him (Heb. 11:6). If you don't believe God is a rewarder, you are rejecting a major biblical doctrine and have a false view of God.[\[6\]](#)

Of course, we must always remember that the Lord knows the motivations of our hearts – and these will be taken into account at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 4:5). In addition, Jesus solemnly warns us: "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you

do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven" (Matt. 6:1).

The biblical picture of rewards, then, would seem to go something like this. The Lord is absolutely worthy of our obedience and service, whether we ever personally profit from it or not (e.g. see Luke 17:10). Nevertheless, the Lord is a rewarder of those who seek Him and He commands us to seek His rewards as well! And when one really thinks about it, "Hearing our Master say, 'Well done' will not simply be for our pleasure but for *his*!"[\[7\]](#)

The Life God Rewards

What kind of life does God reward? For what sort of works will believers be rewarded when they stand before the judgment seat of Christ? The simplest answer to this question, and the most general, is that we will be rewarded for everything we've done that was motivated by our love for the Lord and empowered by His Spirit. Indeed, Jesus said that we would even be rewarded for simply giving a cup of cold water to someone because he is a follower of Christ (Matt. 10:42).

But the Bible specifically mentions many other things for which we can also be rewarded. The New Testament describes as many as five different crowns which will be given to believers for various works of faithfulness, obedience, discipline, and love. For example, there is the *imperishable crown* (1 Cor. 9:25), which appears to be rewarded for "determination, discipline, and victory in the Christian life."[\[8\]](#) There is the *crown of righteousness* which, according to Paul, will be awarded by the Lord "to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8). There is the *crown of life*, "given for faithfulness to Christ in persecution or martyrdom."[\[9\]](#) In the book of Revelation, Jesus tells the church in Smyrna, "the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the

point of death, and I will give you the crown of life" (2:10; see also James 1:12). Additionally, there is the *crown of rejoicing* (1 Thess. 2:19; Phil. 4:1), "given for pouring oneself into others in evangelism and discipleship."[{10}](#) And finally, there is the *crown of glory* (1 Pet. 5:4), "given for faithfully representing Christ in a position of leadership."[{11}](#)

Of course, as Alcorn observes, "There's nothing in this list that suggests it's exhaustive."[{12}](#) Indeed, as we've already seen, the Bible seems to say that we will be rewarded for every act of love and service which we did for the glory of God. But there's another side to this discussion which we dare not overlook. The Bible not only indicates that we can gain rewards; it also warns us that we can lose them as well.

Paul compared the Christian life to an athletic competition in which our goal is to win the prize. This is why, he told the Corinthians, "I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize" (1 Cor. 9:27). The Bible suggests that the works of some believers will be completely consumed at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:15). Tragically, these believers will enter heaven without any rewards from their Lord. To avoid this catastrophe, let us heed Paul's advice and "run in such a way as to get the prize" (1 Cor. 9:24).

Power, Pleasures, and Possessions

What should we think about power, pleasures, and possessions? Are they merely temptations that should be avoided, or genuine goods that can be legitimately sought and desired? Although some may find it surprising, each of these things *is* good—at least considered simply in itself. Each finds its ultimate source in God. And each existed *before* sin and evil corrupted His good creation. God has always been *powerful*. He clearly

took *pleasure* in His work of creation, repeatedly describing it as “good” (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). And as the Creator of all that exists (other than himself, of course), everything ultimately belongs to God (1 Cor. 10:26). Indeed, the Bible sometimes describes Him as the “*possessor* of heaven and earth” (Gen. 14:19). Clearly, then, there’s nothing inherently wrong with power, pleasures, or possessions.

So why have these things gained such tainted reputations? Probably because they’ve so often been misused and abused by sinful men and women. Indeed, describing sin and evil as the misuse, abuse, perversion or corruption of some good gift of God is part of a long and venerable tradition in the history of philosophy and theology. And one doesn’t have to look very far to find plenty of examples of man’s sinful misuse of power, pleasures, and possessions. Just turn on the evening news, or read the local paper, and you’ll find many such examples. But we must always remember that it’s the *misuse* of these things that is sinful and wrong; the things in themselves are good and desirable. And this is confirmed by the teaching of Scripture.

Consider the kind of rewards God offers us. For faithful and obedient service now, He promises power, pleasures, and possessions in eternity! Jesus made it clear that those who are faithful with the little things in this life, will be rewarded with great power and authority in the next (Luke 19:15-19). He taught that those who invest their time, talents, and treasures in building God’s kingdom here and now are laying up great treasures in heaven for themselves in the hereafter (Matt. 6:19-21; 19:21). And pleasures? The psalmist wrote of God, “In Thy presence is fullness of joy; in Thy right hand there are pleasures forever” (16:11).

Randy Alcorn has written, “God has created us each with desires for pleasure, possessions, and power.”[\[13\]](#) We want these things “not because we are sinful but *because we are human*.”[\[14\]](#) Although our sinfulness can, and often does, lead

us to misuse these things, we've seen that they're actually good gifts of God. "Power, possessions, and pleasures are legitimate objects of desire that our Creator has instilled in us *and* by which he can motivate us to obedience." [{15}](#) May we faithfully serve the Lord, trusting him as "the Rewarder of those who diligently seek him." [{16}](#)

Investing in Eternity

A Christian worldview must be fleshed-out in the rough and tumble world of our daily lives if we're going to be salt and light to the surrounding culture. Now, as always, true disciples must be "doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves" (Jas. 1:22).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told his followers:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matt. 6:19-21).

Many of us read these verses and only hear Jesus' command not to store up treasures on earth. But if this is all we hear, then we're missing the main point that Jesus is trying to make. As Alcorn observes, the central focus of this passage "is not the renunciation of earthly treasures but the accumulation of heavenly treasures. We're to avoid storing up unnecessary treasures on earth not as an end in itself, but as a life strategy to lay up treasures in heaven." [{17}](#) In a sense, Jesus is calling us to adopt a long-term investment strategy.

Think about the fate of all our earthly treasures. Isn't Jesus right? Won't they either wear out, break down, rust, become outdated, or get stolen? And even if none of this happens, we

can't hold on to earthly wealth forever, can we? "Either it leaves us while we live, or we leave it when we die."[\[18\]](#) So is it really smart to pour all our time and energy into the accumulation of earthly treasures? Is this really a wise investment strategy?

We've been discussing issues raised by Randy Alcorn's excellent book, *The Law of Rewards*. I can think of no better way to conclude than with this powerful and thought-provoking citation:

Gather your family and go visit a junkyard or a dump. Look at all the piles of "treasures" that were formerly Christmas and birthday presents. Point out things that people worked long hours to buy and paid hundreds of dollars for, that children quarreled about, friendships were lost over, honesty was sacrificed for, and marriages broke up over. Look at the remnants of gadgets and furnishings that now lie useless after their brief life span. Remind yourself that most of what you own will one day end up in a junkyard like this. And even if it survives on earth for a while, you won't. . . . When you examine the junkyard, ask yourself this question: 'When all that I ever owned lies abandoned, broken, useless, and forgotten, what will I have done with my life that will last for eternity?[\[19\]](#)

Notes

1. Much of the material for this article comes from Randy Alcorn, *The Law of Rewards* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003). If you're interested in exploring this topic further, you may also want to read Bruce Wilkinson (with David Kopp), *A Life God Rewards: Why Everything You Do Today Matters Forever* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2002).
2. Alcorn, 7.
3. Ibid., 6.
4. Ibid., 99-100.
5. Ibid., 105.

6. Ibid., 116.
7. Ibid., 92.
8. Ibid., 91.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., 92.
13. Ibid., 111.
14. Ibid., 112.
15. Ibid., 113.
16. Ibid., 121.
17. Ibid., 22.
18. Ibid., 23.
19. Ibid., 23.

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