***Crowns

Colossians 1:15-20

COL-141***

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Our subject is "Hymn in Honor of Christ, number 31 in Colossians 1:15-20.

God the Father has provided His Son, Jesus Christ, in His humanity, with a spiritual power system in order that he could live victoriously above sin while he was on this earth in the devil's world. This system for living combined the positive volition knowledge of the principles of doctrine, which were taught Christ from boyhood on up, and the temporal fellowship that he always experienced of the power of the Holy Spirit in fellowship with His Heavenly Father. This combination is laid out even in the Old Testament, in Isaiah, as that which God will provide for the humanity of the Savior to walk through this world under satanic domination, and not to become a spiritual casualty. The wonderful thing about that is that that same system is now available to all of us. In fact, it's the only way that you and I, in our humanity, will make it through Satan's world. The Lord Jesus Christ did not call upon His deity to carry His humanity through the satanic scene. He was in the same position as we are, except for one difference – He didn't have a sin nature.

So, with this combination, Jesus Christ (the man) successfully resisted Satan and Satan's evil world system, which was constantly tempting Him to subject Himself to it, and to fall into sin. This same spiritual power is now available to the church-age believer, in order that we can resist the temptations to sin which come from the sin nature within us; from the world about us; and, from Satan himself. The believer, therefore, like Christ, must remain in temporal fellowship with the Father in order for him to be filled, and for us to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to do what is right. And along with that, we must know the principles of the doctrines of Scripture by which God will guide each believer daily. It is the knowledge of the mind of God contained in doctrine of principles which enables the believer to be guided by the Holy Spirit. That is the material with which He guides us.

The divine provision for the church-age believer's knowledge of doctrine, which is essential for this power system to work, is the local church organization, which God has provided, with an expository teaching ministry of the pastor-teacher. The believer who is in temporal fellowship, with all alone since confessed, will be equipped in doctrine by that pastor-teacher. And that which the believer will accept as truth now becomes part of his human spirit reservoir of divine viewpoint. The believer is then able to perform divine good works of Christian service with his spiritual gifts. The final result is that the body of Christ, the church, is built up from grace salvation to spiritual maturity. It is a marvelous system which God has provided, but it's all dependent upon expository preaching in the local church. The devil knows that. He spotted that early on. He tried to trick Jesus Christ by using Scripture itself, in the experience on the mount of temptation. He tried to bypass the resistance of Christ by quoting Scripture to Him, which the devil was misusing. But the Lord didn't fall for it, because He'd been taught the Word of God.

If the local church pastor-teacher is not feeding the flock on the Word of God, the people do not have the mind of God. If the local church pastor-teacher fails himself to be a student of Scripture, and equipped thereby to explain the mind of God to his congregation, this marvelous spiritual power system breaks down. The dynamic is all gone. But I want you to know that it is there; it has been provided; and it has been field-tested by Christ Himself. It works. This little point alone should cause a great sobering your soul to realize how costly it is to be absent from a church service that is giving you the mind of Christ, through the Word of God.

One person came up to me today and said, "I couldn't help thinking, as I listened to the explanation of the marvelous provision that God has made for our spiritual stability and welfare, to think that the very people who need this most are not here this morning. And the very people who need most to hear what we will be dealing with tonight, of one of the great consequences of expository preaching, are not here tonight to hear about it." But I said to this person, "Yes, but hundreds will hear via tapes what we have said, and they will be eager to get it. They will be enriched, and we who are here will be enriched. And those who are not here are again going to be victimized by Satan, poorer for all eternity.

Every church is not just as good as every other church. Every church has to match up to this standard of God's objective. If the objective is not there, the knowledge of the Word of God will not be there. If the Christians are not fed the spiritual food of doctrine to sustain their spiritual lives, and to maintain their heavenly perspective and their motivation to serve God, they won't do it. It'll all break down. You can stir up their emotions. You can stir up their excitement. You can play on their experiences, but it will not carry them through.

A couple of years ago, I attended a very large church. It was a Sunday morning service. Unlike our church, the people came before the service started. They came by the droves. And the pastor's sermon dealt with one of the most magnificent areas of Scripture in the Word of God: Romans 12:1-2. We have explained that great passage to you on several occasions. And it is a passage that dovetails exactly into what we've been talking about here, of the local church ministry, to get Christians in a position where they can function in the devil's world through the Word of God. You may remember that Romans 12:1-2 says, "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God (which included the grace provision of salvation) to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice (your physical bodies presented to God, not to Satan), acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." Presenting yourself in your physical structure for God's use and service is an act of worship. Now, who would do that? None of us. That is not a natural act. That is not a natural inclination. We're not predisposed to do that at all. Something has to happen that causes a change within us that drives us to that.

So, he tells us about it in the second verse: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good, acceptable, and perfect." Well, I thought, "What an opportunity." This man is speaking to a couple of thousand people here this morning. And he has a knowledge of the Word of God. And here is a great opportunity for him to focus people upon the essential of their lives, that which is going to enable them to present their bodies as an act of worship, a holy living sacrifice to the service of God, redounding to their eternal rewards and their temporal blessings, and verse 2 tells us how to do it.

Well, he never touched on what was in there. I knew he knew enough Greek to know that "conformed" means don't pattern your life on the outside patterns of the world. And he did touch on that. He got that point. In fact, he brought one of those little trays that you put Jell-O in to make a mold, and he held it up. He said, "What this word is telling us is not to conform our lives to a certain pattern here. Here, it's the pattern that constitutes Satan's world." That was good – going to the heart of the matter. And that's a great challenge. Then I was waiting for him now to say, "And here's how you're going to do that." But instead, from then on, he went challenging. He challenged the women of the church how they should act in their lives and in their service to God. He challenged the men. He challenged the wives. He challenged the husbands. He challenged the singles. He challenged the doubles. He challenged the triples. He challenged the youth. He challenged the college people. And he had a word of admonition to each of them. And I'm waiting for him to go down to say: "This is achieved (this not cutting your life into the pattern and forming it into the mold of the world) by having a transformation. And this word in the Greek language means an internal change: an internal transformation. Now, how can I get internally transformed so that my life externally will conform itself to the pattern of God's thinking and purpose. It is very simply by the renewing of your mind. And the Greek there is telling us by a dramatic change of my mind. A change from what? From my natural human viewpoint that I'm comes up from my sin nature, and which I'm constantly bombarded with by society, into a mind that has been changed by the Word of God. It's the instruction of the Word of doctrine (the expository preaching) that will change my mind, to renew it. And that internal knowledge of the Word of God through the grace system of perception, and the spiritual maturity structure that builds in the soul, will enable me to be a real man or woman of God.

Well, I waited for him to say, "The Bible tells us that Satan is seemingly transformed into a preacher of light, because that particular passage of the Greek language uses a different word for "transform." It says that Satan transforms himself into the image of an angel of light. But the word for "transform" is external. He cannot transform himself to God's standard, and to principles of Scripture and to godliness, because that's not what he is on the inside. He is transforming himself to what he is externally – the enemy of God. But he pretends to be an angel of light.

What a warning that would have been to all these people that he was giving admonition to, that he should have said, "Now, you will play the fool if you think that transforming yourself externally; keeping rules; and, following legalisms is the way that you're going to beat the devil at his own game of trying to bring you down as a servant of God, because that's all his admonitions were about – to get people to be servants of God, and then, at the critical point, he didn't do his job of telling them how to do it, and it was right there in Scripture, so that your mind will be renewed by doctrine from human viewpoint to a divine viewpoint. You will have the mind of God. And when you have that, you'll be able to prove ("demonstrate" is what that word means) what the will of God is. And that's what life is all about. And you'll find that it's the good – that which is suitable for its purpose. It's acceptable to God. It's pleasing to Him. And it's perfect. It's mature.

What a passage of Scripture! What a great promise. And what an explanation with just a few little Greek words brought out to the people, they would have had in understanding. But he never touched it. This is what I'm talking about: how deceptive it is that you think one church service is as good as another, and one context of church operation is as good as another, because inevitably you will judge those by externals. And as God says, "Man looks upon the outside, but I look upon the heart." And the difference is very big indeed. The divine provision of God in the church age for the church-age believer is to know the Word of God so that his mind is transformed, so that internally he becomes something that is the image of Christ to be reflected externally in his life. The provision is expository preacher by the pastor-teacher. If he fails, then everything else fails.

If Christians are not fed spiritual food to sustain their lives, they will break down. The believers will suffer from spiritual malnutrition, and God's work of proclaiming His Word will not be done. Christians will go into eternity with wasted lives, having never fulfilled their divine mission in life. And they will stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ, weeping for the loss of rewards. And it's all going to be the fault of the pastor-teacher.

However, as I told you this morning, because you are a priest of God, you're responsible to see to it that that kind of nonsense is not pulled on you, and that you do not sit and chew on the chaff, and never have the nutritious grain of the Word fed to you. That is your problem. But the average Christian is so carried away when he comes into an operation that's jumpin' and jivin' that he thinks that that's where it's at. These empty chairs tonight testify to the contempt. There are plenty of people in our circle such that every chair should be filled. The contempt; the indifference; and, the lack of evaluation for God's power system – the dynamic for living the Christian life.

You will be happy with the fact that you were here because the Bible says: "The word of God will never return void. It'll always bear its good fruit. Christians who are not prepared by the pastor-teacher for the spiritual warfare of daily life will become spiritual casualties. The devil will have a field day pushing them into emotional and experiential substitutes for doctrine, and for the guiding of the Holy Spirit. And their human viewpoint will prevail. If you do not have God's thinking, you'll come up with your own. And your own will always base its authority, not on the Word of God, because you don't know that. You'll base your authority on your feelings, and you'll base your authority on your experiences. And there are whole denominations that are built on nothing but feelings and experiences, and they think they're having a wonderful, great time with God.

Somebody told me this morning that they had a little trouble getting here on the highway, because they passed one of the big charismatic churches nearby here in the Metroplex, and the cars were on the highway, lined up, trying to get on the exit ramp, so they can get into the parking lot, so they could go there chew on chaff, and play the emotional game, and the experiential game that the pastor-teacher was going to play on them. And they all thought that they couldn't rush fast enough to get there. And yet, what do people do who have an opportunity for knowledge? They can't even get here on time, let alone a rush to get here. And they think that life is just OK.

Well, at least we will be able to say that the blood of no man's hand is on ours. We have made a big emphasis in the last few weeks, and we have clarified this issue. And parents who allow their children to get into nonsense religion – they will pay for it as well, let alone their children. God is not mocked. What you sow, you certainly will reap. God holds every member of His royal family, in this church age, responsible for his own spiritual nourishment, and for the information he has. Those who tolerate a local church of non-expository preaching will suffer eternal loss of rewards in heaven, and they'll be terribly spiritually disoriented now.

Why do young Christian women start associating with pigs in the human race? Why do they associate with twits and wimps? Because they don't have God's point of view. Why do young men find an attraction to lowlife pig women? Because they have no orientation to the Word of God. You wonder why anybody would want to go into sin that potentially can destroy your life physically. You sit; you listen; you watch; and, you shake your head. You cannot believe it. Yet, all of our society today is being geared to opposition to God's standards for living, and being geared to sustaining the devil's world.

Next Sunday night, you will be blown out of the water. You'll have an experience that you will not soon forget. And you'll get a little better picture of what it is we're up against on what Paul calls "this evil age." The Bible is our manual for life – the life for which God created us to live. Good intentions; sincerity; emotions; and, experience cannot substitute for the mind of God which can only be received in the Word of doctrine by the illumination of the Holy Spirit when the pastor-teacher has done his explaining. And that good intention thing is so big. And I get so tired of Christians who tell me what they're going to do for the Lord someday, as soon as something gels up and something comes together. And it takes an enormous amount of grace, as even this day I had to listen to it: the promises, and the will of the wisp, and that something in the wind that sometime is going to develop. And you wonder when people are actually going to get real with the deceptions they're playing upon themselves.

**Isaiah 55**

Everything that we have said is so marvelously declared as an invitation and a challenge by the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 55 that I want to read it tonight. I hope you have your Bible. In Isaiah 55, we have the invitation and the challenge of God to all of us, summarizing everything that we have said: being someone who is oriented to God's thinking. And who, consequently, receives all the good things of life that can be available. And all the excuses we make, and all the good intentions, are not going to cut it with God. I don't care if you don't feel too well. You'll feel a whole lot better if you're here in church. You'll feel a whole lot better if you get your life spiritually in tune with the mind of God.

Isaiah 55:1: "Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters (the Word of God). And you who have no money: come; buy, and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance." I have warned you that God will hold you responsible for going up that offering box, and to those offering plates, and putting in money to sustain a non-expository church ministry. You will account for it. And God will hold you responsible for that misuse of His treasures as his steward. You should delight yourself not in that which is not bread (the bread of life), but with that which is. You should be spending your money on that which is not the bread of life.

Verse 3: "Incline your ear and come to me. Listen, that you may live. And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, according to the faithful mercies shown to David. Behold, I've made him a witness to the peoples: a leader and commander for the peoples. Behold, you will call a nation you do not know, and a nation which knows you not will run to you, because of the Lord your God: even the Holy one of Israel. For He has glorified you." When you are identified as a Christian who understands biblical principles, you're the person that those who are in trouble are going to come to. When they are finally fed up with dealing with the fools of the religious world, they're going to come to someone that they see knows the truth.

Verse 6: "Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. For My thoughts are not your thoughts. Neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." Until you have the thoughts of God through doctrine, you will not operate on the heights of heavenly principles. You're going to grovel around as if you're nothing but another animal here on the face of the earth.

Verse 10: "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth, and making it bare and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My Word be which goes forth from My mouth. It shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it. For you will go out with joy, and be led forth with peace. The mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thorn bush, the cypress will come up. Instead of the nettle, the myrtle will come up, and it will be a memorial to the Lord for an everlasting sign which will not be cut off." The marvels of the Word of God, and it all comes to the believer from expository preaching.

**Crowns of Honor**

I want to begin this evening a look at one specific area of the product of expository preaching, which is very important to every one of us. Pity those who have missed this. It is not new, but now, in the context, perhaps you will grasp a greater importance and a greater understanding of, in terms of your life in the Word of God, through that local church ministry. When the church fails you in expository preaching, you will fail in this opportunity that is extended to you as one of the rewards for all eternity that is yours to enjoy. I'm speaking about what the Bible calls crowns: the heavenly Judgment Seat of Christ crowns of honor.

**A Victor's Crown**

There are four distinct crowns of honor to be awarded to those who merit them. These are not presented as something that are associated with salvation. This is post-salvation securing by your personal earning. This is something unlike salvation, which you must earn, or you will not get it. This word that is used for "crowns" looks like this in the Greek Bible, to give us our first clue to understand this doctrine. It is the Greek word "stephanos." It is from this word that we get the English word "Stephen." This is a victor's crown.

This is in contrast to another Greek word, which looks like this. It's "diadema," from which we get the English word "diadem." The diadem crown refers to that which an imperial ruler; a king; or, a monarch wears. But the "stephanos" crowns (the four crowns of honor that God has for Christians) are victory crowns. They are It is for an achievement. It is for an accomplishment. It is a symbol of triumph in a game or a contest. It is a reward which you must earn.

This is illustrated, for example, in 1 Corinthians 9:24-25: "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize (or the crown). Run in such a way that you may win, and everyone who competes in the game exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we, an imperishable: The crown, in ancient times, that was placed on the head of a victor in an athletic contest, was made of leaves – of some vegetation. It was a perishable thing and it would soon dry up and be gone. But Paul says, "Wait a minute. God has some special crowns for some special Christians, which they will enjoy for all eternity. It will never dry up and blow. Notice also 2 Timothy 4:7-8: "I have fought the good fight. I finished the course. I've kept the faith." This is the summary of the apostle Paul on his final days of life before execution. And he can say, "I have fought the good fight, the fight of the soldier of Jesus Christ in the angelic warfare," because he had doctrine, and he had temporal fellowship with the Spirit of God so he could fight a good fight in the devil's world: "I have finished the course. I have performed my mission. I kept the faith. I have been true to the body of doctrine." He couldn't be true to what he didn't know.

So, there's the whole thing for you – the knowledge of doctrine; the running of the mission of your life; and, and the result at the end to say, "I've done the job to which I was called." Verse 8: "In the future, as the result of this, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge will award to me on that day, the day of the rapture, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing." Those who look forward to that rapture, and the appearing of the Lord, they too will be crowned.

The apostle Paul here makes it very clear that he has a crown called the crown of righteousness, which comes to him as a result of how he lived his life, and what he did in God's service. This is not something that came to him by an act of God's grace. It's a recognition for distinguished service above and beyond. People were honored in the ancient world, even on social occasions. When some guest was to be honored for something that they had done, they would put a crown on his head. It would be a stephanos crown – a crown of victory. In the ancient world, the victor's crown was woven together and made in the circle of leaves. That's what was placed upon the head. Now, that's a little bit of isagogics. It's background information of the times.

Well, when you know that, you will have a new appreciation for the ridicule which was cast upon Jesus by the crown of thorns, because that crown of thorns, was put on the head of the brutalized, beaten – just physically crushed person of Jesus Christ, and they called it a stephanos crown (Matthew 27:29). Now you can appreciate the irony of the ridicule that they were placing upon Him, because they understood what a "stephanos" crown was. That was the crown of a victor. They did not use the Greek word "diadema" (of a diadem) of a ruling imperial King.

**The Crown of Thorns**

Matthew 27:29: And after weaving a crown of thorns (a "stephanos" crown of thorns), they put it on His head, and a reed in His hand, and they kneeled down before Him, and they mocked Him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews – victor, and a conqueror. That was the edge of ridicule that they were thrusting at the person of Jesus Christ Who had never harmed anyone, and Who had done nothing but good. And they didn't make it a crown out of simple laurel leaves, or something like that. They made it out of thorns, so as they ridicule Him as a victor, they made it very physically painful for Him.

Crowns of honor are what we're dealing with here now, which are to be given to deserving, church-age believers as a special part of their reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ. There are other things one receives as a reward, whatever all that may include, but one of the things that is there are these crowns. Nobody in heaven will have this crown who has not been under expository preaching instruction. There is no way you can do it. You don't have the information. You don't have the spiritual capacity. You don't have the quality of the mind of God flowing through your thinking, and controlling your thinking. You have a little smattering ideas here and there of spiritual things, but you do not have the powerful, flowing river of God's thinking in your soul. There's no way you're going to have it. And all you are is going to be a little person of the world, like the gang who's not here tonight, tossed around by every wind of doctrine: every emotionalism; every experience; and, every appeal of the world system.

**The Crown of Joy**

The Bible calls the first crown the crown of joy. The word "joy" looks like this in the Greek: "chara." This word connotes a sense of happy satisfaction for some reason. Here, it refers to a great joy for a life which has been invested in the production of divine good works through the Holy Spirit. It is a life which has avoided wasting or losing one's life in the production of human good from the sin nature. So, the apostle Paul says, "You are my joy and crown" to the saints whom he has taught, and who are positive to the Word of God. What is he connecting that to? "You are my joy and crown because I find a great joy in your positive volition response to my ministry of the Word of God to you. It is the result of his service.

Luke 9:23-25: "And He was saying to them all (Jesus saying to them all), 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.'" Your cross is your mission as per your spiritual gifts: "For whoever wishes to save his life for himself (his use) shall lose it. But whoever loses his life for My sake, because he has invested his life in God's service, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses (or forfeits) himself?'" Now, this is what we're talking about. Most Christians do exactly this. They lose their lives. They forfeit themselves. They live for this moment; for the temporal thing; and, for being part of society which is around them. They do not live for the sense of serving God. A life which has led the unsaved to grace salvation in Jesus Christ, and who has led the saved into spiritual maturity through doctrine, is the life to which God has called us. That is the service. That is our calling. Those who respond with positive volition to your ministry of the Word of God become a source of joy to you. And they are recorded in heaven because of your ministry to them. This is what qualifies the believer for the crown of joy, or the crown of rejoicing at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

This crown is the result of expository preaching of the pastor-teacher. It enables a Christian to identify and to use His spiritual gifts in God's service, and thus he fulfills the call of the particular service that God has for each one of us. Nothing is so marvelous as to have the crown of joy, a reward for a life of service, and fulfilling your calling. The Christians who are born into the human race, like all the rest of us, with a divine mission, who never carry that mission through, will not bear this crown. But those whose life fulfills the mission for which you were born, this crown is going to be on your head, and it'll be there for all eternity for everyone to see.

**The Crown of Righteousness**

Then we have the crown of righteousness. The Scripture is 2 Timothy 4:7-8. The apostle says, "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course. I've kept the faith. In the future, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day. Now, you know very well that he's not talking about salvation, because he is making it very clear that this crown of righteousness is a great reward that God is giving to him. This word "righteousness" in the Greek looks like this. It's the Greek word "dikaiosune." The word "dikaiosune" connotes a right action based on the integrity of God, as God expresses that integrity in His commandments, for our thinking and for our conduct. This word stresses the idea of the holiness which characterizes God, and is the standard for our Christian conduct.

So, while the first crown of joy had to do with our Christian service devotion, this crown has to do with our godly living. This crown has to do with how much time you spend in temporal fellowship, walking in fellowship with your Father, because known sins are confessed. Romans 6:11-13: "Even so, consider yourselves to be dead to sin (the sin nature), but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, do not let the sin nature reign in your mortal body, that you should obey its lust (the lust patterns of the sin nature). And do not go on presenting the members of your body to the sin nature as instruments of unrighteousness. But present yourself to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of "dikaiosune" to God (as instruments of righteousness to God)." This is what God is calling us to do. Don't use the parts of your body to do evil, including your mind. Use your physical structure to do that which is righteous, and to do that which honors God's integrity. God's absolute righteousness is shown by the fact that Christ had to pay the penalty of death for man's sin in order to satisfy the justice of God, so that God's love could be set free, and it could be extended in salvation to save us from the lake of fire.

The holiness of God required that enormous sacrifice on the part of the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity taking on humanity for all eternity. It costs that much. It was no small thing for God to bring us salvation. His Holiness had to be kept intact. Therefore, godliness is very, very big with God our Father. For those whose life is spent in that temporal fellowship zone, God says, "Well done, good and faithful servant." I want you to have this crown of righteousness. This is a crown of honor to recognize what you have done: positive volition toward God's commandments, as one's way of life is honored with this crown – divine viewpoint living instead of Satan's human viewpoint living. This is based on maintaining temporal fellowship to the Father, through confession of sins, and the correction of our conduct. This means being spiritual Christians rather than carnal Christians, as the norm of our lives.

Now, just put yourself in the place of the poor, average church member. How many of your Christian friends would understand if you asked them to tell you about the principle of confession of sins; to explain 1 John 1:9; and, the impact of that upon their lives in service for God, and in rewards? They don't know what you're talking about. Those people cannot even dream of having a crown of righteousness. Oh, they have a lot of religion. They have a lot of human level happiness in their church association. And they have a lot of programs. But when the devil comes up, he can knock them right over without any problem. And they fall into sin because they're carnal. Their norm of life is carnal. God is saying, "When I find a man or a woman who lives a life as the norm, as a spiritual Christian in fellowship with Me, I want to recognize that person forever. He gets a crown of the righteous life – symbolizing the righteous life he led. This is above and beyond the level of experiential sanctification in one's living. This is keeping the faith of Scripture, the body of truth, while serving God, as James 1:22 says: "We keep the faith."

This victory crown honor awaits every church-age believer who is ready to exploit the potential for godly living through doctrine from the pastor-teacher's expository instruction, and the living in temporal fellowship from the confession of our known sins.

Do you see where we've come? We've come back to where we started tonight, on the dynamic power system that God has given, for us to survive in our humanity in the devil's world. But if nobody tells you about it, and if nobody explains the system to you, you'll be a victim. And most Christians, when they hear things like this, they think you're crazy. They think that that's cult talk. They cannot relate to the deep things of the Spirit of God, and that's what we're talking about.

These are two marvelous crowns: the crown of joy from a life spent in fulfilling your divine mission in life of Christian service with your spiritual gifts; and, the crown of righteousness for living in the inner circle of spirituality, in fellowship of God your Father.

We have two other crowns that are magnificent significance. Those we will look at next time.

Our Heavenly Father, we thank You for the fact that You extend to us the special recognition and honor that we may enjoy in heaven with these crowns of victory. We thank You that it's all spelled out very clearly in Scripture, and Your provision is extended to everybody. This is not a special group of people only. It's simply for those who understand the dynamics of the spiritual life, and the power system that You have given us. We pray that we'll have a new appreciation for the ministry of Berean Church; for its devotion to expository preaching; and, for the fact that here there is availability for the people of God. While Christians would flee it, and find other things to do on the Lord's Day, we pray that we will be faithful to You, knowing that, without this feeding upon the Word of God on the Lord's Day, everything that we can be, and everything that we should be, in our lives, and in Your service, and in the kind of eternity we will have, will all be destroyed, and will all be lost. We pray that You will give us a great, sobering understanding that we have been greatly privileged this day to have heard these things from Your Word. Please bless the offerings which we bring to You, an expression of what we have heard to keep the Brand ministry fruitful.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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