***Crowns  
  
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It is no secret that the apostle Paul compares the Christian life to military service and to a combat situation. In many places, he refers to this in his writings. In 2 Timothy 2:3-4, for example, we read, "Therefore, endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that wars entangles himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please Him who has chosen him to be a soldier." For the apostle Paul, being a Christian was enduring the kind of combat hardness and conditions that are characteristic of men who are fighting on the field of battle for national survival.

In 1 Corinthians 9:24, he again makes this comparison to a military operation: "Don't you know that they who run in a race run all, but one receives the prize? So, run that you may obtain. And every man that strives for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible. I, therefore, so run not as uncertain. So I don't fight as one that beats the air." Then he goes on to describe how he systematically maintains his combat readiness in order to do the work of the Lord.

In 1 Timothy 6:12, Paul says, "Fight the good fight of faith. Lay hold on eternal life unto which you are called, and have professed a good profession before many witnesses." Again, the Christian life is a combat situation – fighting the good fight of faith.

In 2 Timothy 4:6-7, Paul says, "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand." As he wrote this letter, he knew that he was about to be executed. This was his second imprisonment. He had been freed from the first. He knew that the second was going to end in his death. So, in verse 7, he says, "I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith." That's a great thing for a Christian to be able to say as he comes to the end of his life – that he has fought a good fight, and furthermore, that he has finished his course. He has executed the plan that God had for his life. Now he can go into the Lord's presence knowing that he has been a faithful and good soldier of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The reason for this strong military analogy on the part of the apostle Paul to the Christian life is because Christians are indeed involved in a military combat situation in the form of the angelic conflict. The comparison of the Christian life to military combat is furthermore extended to decorations of honor from God for meritorious service. It is those declarations of honor that we're going to think about in this session.

**Crowns**

God takes the trouble to recognize outstanding devotion to duty, and he decorates in heaven that duty forever with a thing that the Bible calls crowns. Crowns are more than rewards. Rewards are one thing that a Christian receives for service, but for outstanding meritorious service, he receives, in addition to rewards, crowns. These crowns are, in fact, God's Congressional Medals of Honor. These marks of special honor will be worn by some church-age believers for all eternity. They will not be worn by others.

Crowns go to the positive volition type who do the work of God. They do not go to the talkers, the emoters, or the con artists. There is a certain type of Christian who will never qualify for a crown just because he has never breached the old sin nature desire to put on a front, and to be pretending to be something, even to themselves, that they are not. God sees us as we are. He is no respecter of persons. To certain of the believers in the body of Christ, there will be recognition for duty above and beyond.

In Revelation 3:11, therefore, we have read, "I come quickly. Hold that fast which you have (in the form of Bible doctrine information), that no man take your crown." Here, the Lord Jesus Christ cautions the Philadelphia type believer (that is, the Bible-oriented fundamentalist type believer) to be careful not to forfeit his crown of honor to another believer who is positive to the Word of God and to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Remember that God's plan is going to be executed completely. Believers will be the agents who carry out God's decree (God's plan). The plan is going to be executed, and believers are going to execute it. The question is, who is going to do it?

Soldiers of Jesus Christ, who, through negative volition to Bible doctrine, become spiritual casualties will be replaced by another believer. I can guarantee you that. When a soldier becomes a spiritual casualty, God's work goes on. There are always replacements ready to fill the gap. So, it behooves all of us to stay in combat readiness and in shape for spiritual combat, because to become a spiritual casualty means not only a loss of reward, but it means even a loss of crowns.

So, let's look at this business of crowns: crowns of reward; and, crowns of honor for victorious achievement. They are, as we say, heaven's equivalent of what our nation has as its highest military decoration, the Congressional Medal of Honor. The word crown that is used in Revelation looks like this: "stephanos." "Stephanos" is a noun. It is the word for a "crown" that describes a symbol of triumph in a game or a contest. It is a reward or a prize. In 1 Corinthians 9:24-25, it is used in that way. In 2 Timothy 4:7-8, the word "stephanos" is used in terms of being a mark of victory. It is a token of honor for distinguished service, or for military victory of some kind.

This word was used in the ancient world to describe what was placed upon the heads of guests to honor them at a banquet. When they were having a banquet in someone's honor, they would put a "stephanos" crown upon his head, which was a mark of honor. These were made of various leaves woven together, and they symbolized either victory or honor.

The same word is used as a term of ridicule when referring to the crown of thorns which had been put upon the head of Jesus Christ. In Matthew 27:29, Mark 15:17, and John 19:2-5, the word "stephanos" is used as the crown of thorns. It's ridiculing there that Jesus Christ had this crown put on his head, and they called it a victory crown. It was a crown of his humiliation and of his defeat, in effect, at the hands of the Roman authorities.

There is another crown that this is in contrast to, and we want to make the distinction. It looks like this in the Greek Bible: "diadema." "Diadema" is a different kind of crown. This is a crown such as we have in Revelation 12:3. It refers to a crown, but it's this other kind: "There appeared another wonder in heaven, and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns upon his head. This particular verse is referring to government rulers. Therefore, this crown is not a crown of victory. It is the crown of governmental ruling authority. You have this also in Revelation 13:1 and Revelation 19:12. You have to distinguish, in the English Bible, which kind of crown the Greek Bible is talking about – whether it's the victory crown, or whether it's the imperial crown of ruling authority.

**Four Crowns**

So, now we come to four crowns of this "stephanos" type, which the Bible speaks of, and which are available to believers.

1. **The Crown of Rejoicing**

Crown number one is called the crown of rejoicing. This is referred to in a couple of places in Scripture. One of them is in Philippians 4:1: "Therefore, my brethren, dearly beloved, and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved."

It is also referred to in 1 Thessalonians 2:19: "For what is our hope or joy or crown of rejoicing? Aren't you even in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy." This crown is associated with believers being positive to instruction in God's word. In Philippians 4:1, the concept of joy and crown is related. People who are positive to the gospel are saved, and then they go on to build a spiritual maturity structure in their soul, move into the Lord's presence in that kind of maturity. In 1 Thessalonians 2:19: "For what is our hope or joy or crown of rejoicing? Are not even you (the people to whom Paul ministered) in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?" Paul said, "My crown of rejoicing, and your crown of rejoicing is for you to stand before Jesus Christ someday in a certain condition. That condition that he's referring to here is a condition of spiritual maturity built in the soul. Those who are positive spiritually to our ministry become a joy to us, and they become a crown of honor to us in heaven.

The crown of joy is, in effect, the Lord's recognition of a Christian's divine good service – that he has not used his life in vain. In Philippians 2:16, Paul says, "Holding forth the Word of Life that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain, neither labored in vain." The concept here is that Paul says, "I am concerned that I have a life which is productive of divine good through doctrine in the soul. Because of my ministry, the results upon people are joy to me. They have developed, and they have gone forward in the Christian life.

Many congregations are not a crown of joy to their pastor-teachers. They are millstones of grief around their necks. That is often not entirely the fault of the congregation. It is the fault of the pastor-teacher himself who has misdirected the sheep in their spiritual values. He has led them into human good leadership. He has disoriented them with material values. He has given them a taste for the esteem of the world's approval. So, the sheep have been disoriented. This kind of pastor gets his joy when he sees his congregation hustling, instead of seeing members of his congregation develop a spiritual maturity in their souls. Whole denominations are built upon the concept of getting people doing things, and going through the denominational program of ritual activity, and they equate that with moving ahead for the Lord. They equate that with being something that God is pleased with.

So, what are Christians told? Well, if you want to please the Lord, and if you want to move ahead in your Christian life: "How do I do it?" Well, they are told that regular church attendance is going to do it. How much Bible reading you have – that's going to do it? How many Scriptures you memorize – that's going to do it. How many tracts you give out ‐ that's going to do it. How many people you witness to – that's going to do it. But that's not going to do it. All of these things are important and have a value, but they will not build spiritual maturity in your soul. They do not constitute spiritual maturity. This is the great deception that exists among Christians today. What is it that a pastor-teacher (any teacher of the Word of God – you as an individual) should find as a joy in somebody else? The thing that you find as a joy is that you see that this person is positive toward the Word of God, and they are going forward unto God's productive leadership, and the Spirit of God is producing divine good through them. That is a crown of rejoicing.

The pastor-teacher who builds on this basis of getting a hustling congregation is never going to earn a crown of rejoicing. It's going to be a crown of disappointment. You will never earn a crown of rejoicing because of your hustling. You'll earn a crown of disappointment. A congregation which is never fed on the Word of God, and is never directed to Bible doctrine as the only source of spiritual maturity, will never come to any kind of joy whatsoever. That's an emotionally dominated congregation.

So, you have the result of a congregation where you've got a bunch of scrawny sheep and a few unsaved goats thrown in. What is the crown of rejoicing? The crowd of rejoicing is honor for a life of victory of divine good production in Christian service. A crown of rejoicing is the fact that you took the Word of God into your soul, and you were positive with it, and God used you in service. Divine good production is what we get a crown of rejoicing for. Those that we teach become a joy to us as they become part of our crown of rejoicing, because we have produced divine good through them as they have responded to the Word of God. So, it is avoiding human good through the old sin nature. It is leading people into a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ, from salvation to spiritual maturity, so that they can develop divine good works.

The pastor who does that is not generally widely recognized, or perhaps even appreciated, let alone honored on earth. But God's viewpoint is different. The individual believer who seriously goes about orienting people to the Word of God is not the believer who is viewed as a wonderful, wonderful Christian. The average church member thinks that the wonderful Christian is the guy who's got a mouthful-of-teeth smile. He thinks that it's the one who walks around saying, "Praise the Lord," and "God bless you, brother." He thinks that it's the lady who goes home and cooks her little cookies, and takes them over to her Christian friends who are who are having a hard time because they have a problem, and they're suffering for Jesus now. There are all these other things that are such wonderful things that they do. They think that this is the wonderful Christian. Baloney! The Christian that God will honor with the Medal of Honor of the crown of rejoicing is the one who is open to the Word of God and positive. That is the thing that concerns all of us.

There are a lot of people that wouldn't come to a Berean prayer meeting no matter what. They're the arrogant kind that think that, "I don't care what the Bible says about the fact that New Testament believers gathered daily in prayer." We just say, "Well, we'll do it once a week. We don't want to make it too hard on you." When they do not come, they're telling us something about their capacity of divine good production. Oh, boy, do I love the fact that we deal with an absolute God. I'm going to have a ball in heaven, running around when we find out who's right and who's wrong, because I'm going to be right and these guys are going to be wrong, and I'm going to enjoy it thoroughly, because I know what the Word of God says. All of the con artists are going to be exposed like the Enquirer never thought of exposing them. It's going to be a thing of beauty.

This crowd of rejoicing is something tremendous. What an honor to walk around heaven with this pinned on your chest – the crown of rejoicing, because you were a Christian who was receptive to the Word of God. You got your thinking straight. You esteemed what God esteemed in prayer. You esteemed what God esteemed in the study of the Word of God; in Christian service; in kindness of works of mercy to those in need; and, everything else that constitutes the Christian life. You are just loaded with divine good production. God says, "You're my type of man," or "You're my type of woman, and I'm glad to honor you in heaven because of what you have done."

It is knowing and using your spiritual gifts. That's what the crown of rejoicing is. Divine good production is a source of joy. We have an experience of that. We see people who respond positively to the Word of God. We see them going on in the things of the Lord. It's a matter of rejoicing to us. We're glad to see it. We're delighted in it. But when you get to heaven, you're going to find that God will honor you for your divine good production.

1. **The Crown of Righteousness**

There is a second crown. The Bible calls this the crown of righteousness. Consider yourself fortunate that, in the grace of God, you came into this session, because you're hearing information that the average Christian knows nothing about. You're hearing information that is squelched by the devil, and is belittled by preachers. First we had the crown of rejoicing. Now we have the crown now of righteousness. 2 Timothy 4:7-8 talk to us about that crown. Paul says, "I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the Righteous Judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing." This is the crown of reward for godly living; functioning on divine viewpoint on earth as a Christian; and, positive volition to the commands of grace in the New Testament.

Don't forget that the New Testament is filled with commands of what you should do, and what you should not do. It is filled with them: like attending church services; like using the tactic of prayer personally and as a group; like not doing certain things that are absolutely morally wrong; and, so on. The New Testament Bible is filled with the commands for righteous living. It's not a secret. It's not what somebody (and what anybody) thinks. 2 Timothy 4:7 identifies an area of righteous living. Paul says, "I have fought a good fight." Fighting a good fight, as we have indicated, is being a good soldier of Jesus Christ in the angelic warfare. He also compares it to an athletic contest in which he did his best as the servant of the Lord. Then he says, "I have finished my course." This is the goal of the battle. This is fulfilling God's plan of service for one's life.

I remind you again that Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works (for the purpose of good works), which God has before ordained that we should walk in them." The minute that you came to that point where you realized that you were a sinner; that you were destined for hell; that Jesus Christ could offer you a great way of salvation; and, you said, "I believe it," at that moment, you entered the plan of God designed for you from eternity past, which included every good work God has for you to do. Up in heaven, as we told you last time, is that storehouse. That is a storehouse for your good works that are your treasures. God is waiting for you to permit Him to fill it through you, and to prepare you for receiving those rewards. God has a very specific plan for you. Paul said, "I view myself as a runner who is going toward a goal line. I am moving toward the finish line. I don't want to be a drop out. I'm not going to stop along the line. I'm not going to be, as many Christians are: they are in the battle and out of the battle. They're the erratic type in combat. They are easily distracted. Christians who are immature are easily distracted from their Christian service. They're always running off doing something else. You forever have to be staying on them to get the job done that they promised to do.

So, Paul says, "I have finished my course." That was the goal of the battle – executing God's plan for his life. Then he says, "I have kept the faith." Here is the means of fighting the battle. This refers to the positive volition to doctrine, viewing Bible doctrine here as the body of revealed truth. In James 1:22, we read, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." That's what it means to keep the faith – positive volition to the Word of God. When you keep the faith, then you become a godly Christian. Then you live a life of righteousness.

What we're talking about is that there are some Christians who are just great at living godly lives. There are some Christians who are just outstanding in living lives which are compatible with Scripture, because they understand that evil begins in the mind. Therefore, they finally (one day) just grasp the tremendous truth that what they do with their thinking is where it's all it. And from that day, they will not permit their eyes to be the transmitters of evil into the brain. They will not permit their ears to be the transmitters of evil into the brain. They will not permit their thought life to dwell with approval upon that which is evil. Their whole mentality suddenly comes under their control, and under the domination of the Spirit of God. They don't create a vacuum. They replace the evil that is inherently in their thinking with the truth of doctrine. Suddenly, a transformed human being blossoms out before the eyes of others. They become people who can live lives that are compatible to the integrity of God. That's what this is for.

Don't kid yourself. There are not a lot of Christians who live lives that are compatible to God's holiness. But every now and then, along comes one. Very often, he is unnoticed by the world. Very often, he is unnoticed by other Christians. Christians have such sloppy thinking, and have such ridiculous standards as to what is godliness and what isn't, and the person that a church congregation often will esteem is one that God doesn't think much of at all. But in a group of people who understand Bible doctrine, they have a chance to develop a godly lifestyle unless they're just resistant to it. A lot of believers are resistant to godliness because they know it will alienate them from the world. That is the prime number one reason that Christians cannot earn the crown of righteousness – the honor of the medal of righteousness. The reason is that they know that if they live by the lifestyle of the Scriptures, they will be cut off from the world around them, and they want something from that world. They want some honor; they want some authority; they want some recognition; they want some monetary advantage; and, they want something from the world. They realize that if they go for a life of righteousness, the world is going to cool them in a hurry.

As the Lord Jesus spoke to His disciples, he said, "Fellas, you know that's going to happen to you, don't you? So, it's going to happen to you. But I'll say this to you to comfort you. They did it to Me. I'm your Master. You should not expect to be treated better than your Master." So, you guys and girls who are walking around thinking that you're going to be treated better by the world than your Master are on the wrong track. If the world treats you better than they do the Master, then you're part of the world, and you're not part of His elite company of godly living saints.

So, Paul knows the rules of the game from Scripture, and he says, "I obey them. I have learned doctrine. I know what righteous living is." He refers to his constant defense of sound doctrine. 1 Timothy 4:16: "Take heed unto yourself and unto the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this, you shall both save yourself and them that hear you." This is advice to his young associate Timothy. This is not only in terms of eternal life, but you will save Christians from having to go to heaven and suffer loss.

It's going to be really tough for anybody who's ever attended Berean Memorial Church, when they get to heaven, to discover at the Judgment Seat of Christ that they have suffered loss, because they will have suffered it by their most monumental, deliberate, negative volition. They just would not be told. We're going to find out who's right and who's wrong.

In Titus 2:9, Paul says, "Exhort servants to be obedient unto their masters, and to please them well in all things, not answering again." Here again is the stress upon godly living.

Titus 1:9: "Holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to confute the opposers." You see how much emphasis is made in Scripture upon sound doctrine. That is where it's all at. It is the intake of doctrine into the soul. Nothing else is important. All that hustling and all that stuff that churches create – that's not important. A person who is going to be godly will be a person who can produce divine good, but his godliness comes as the result of the Word of God living in his human spirit. Without it, he can't get anywhere.

1 Peter 3:15: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that ask of you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." Be prepared to be able to meet a person's attack upon a point of doctrine. Do you know enough about the Bible to do that? These people who are in the charismatic movement are in a very dangerous group. They're in a cult group. A cult is always identified by one thing: they have a false basis of salvation. If you have a false basis of salvation, you are a cult. That false basis inevitably include some human work. You may be a grand denomination, but you are a cult if you have a wrong basis of salvation. Being a cult means that you are a splintered group off of New Testament Christianity, And the Charismatics are like that.

I had a lady call me the other day. She was inquiring about Berean Christian Academy. After a while, I could begin to see that her probings were moving in a direction. I suddenly realized that she was a charismatic. She wanted to know whether the kids were filled with the Spirit in our school. Well, I assured her that they certainly were. That's one thing we have in our kids in our school – the Spirit. I said, "However, that's not really so important. It's more important whether our teachers are filled with the Spirit." She said, "Well, yes. But do you believe in the gift of tongues?" Now I knew I had her. She was right there, and I knew just where she was going. Here is this poor lady, under some preacher's control, trying to live what she thinks is a godly life for the Lord. I gave her my little speech about, "Yes, the gift of tongues is one of the greatest gifts that ever existed. And it's just amazing, isn't it, that in the New Testament, there were 19 languages that people spoke around the world? And all of a sudden, these apostles could speak in those languages. The people who were visiting from France heard French being spoken on Pentecost; the people visiting from Germany heard German being spoken; the people who visited from Parthia heard Parthian being spoken; and, everything down the line. So, that was really great the way they did that."

Then I said, "You know, the marvelous thing about that is that God the Holy Spirit, when describing that gift, used the word "dialektos" in the Greek Bible, because that word can only mean known languages. It can't mean nonsense syllables, because He knew that somebody down the line was going to come up with an exciting blabbering, and call that tongues. And the Spirit of God was just so careful, you know, to close that off so that we wouldn't be conned by the devil. And we're very careful to keep our students from being conned by things like that." She said, "Well, let me think about it." It was as though I was getting awfully arrogant, with 228 people in our school. You know, how many do I need yet? But, this is fantastic. This poor girl was trying to serve the Lord, and I could just see what was happening to her. There's going to be no crown of righteousness for her, because she has no truth, and she has no Scripture. She's emotionally dominated.

Another grandmother called me frantically on the phone yesterday and said, "Do you have a camp for boys? Is there still a place open for boys? I have two boys." I said, "Yes." She said, "Would you call this number right away? This is my daughter, and I'm the grandmother, and I want these boys to go to camp." So, I was very excited. I wrote down the number, and I called the mother. So the mother says, "Well, tell me about the camp." Right away I could tell that she was very suave. She was asking me about the camp. Then she said, "What kind of boys do you have in camp?" And sure enough, I'll be switched, but she said, "And are these boys filled with the Spirit?" And I thought, "Man, this spirit business is really beginning to drive me nuts here, about these guys. I said, "Yes," and I gave her sort of the same speech again. Finally, she says, "Well, that sounds very good." I said, "I'm just saying all of this because your mother asked me to call and tell you about it. If you're interested, here's the scoop, but you'll have to come by to get the forms because we won't have time to mail them to you." And she says, Well, I'm going to sit here, and I'm going to peel my potatoes, and see what the Lord tells me to do." I said, "Well, be careful that you don't cut yourself. But let me know what you think."

I'll tell you: the woods are full of nuts. And those who do not have instruction in the Word of God are the sitting patsies of every con artist in the religious world. They make people make fools of themselves. The worst thing is that here is the crown of righteousness that that woman will very likely never get anywhere near. God will never be able to honor her for godly living, and yet that's exactly what she thinks she's doing, and that's exactly what she wants to do. But no one has ever taken the trouble to point her in the direction that Scripture says that can be achieved with the Word of God functioning in your soul.

So, this is a victory crown reward that awaits every believer who is ready to exploit the potential for godliness through doctrine. Anytime you are out of the inner circle of Christian fellowship, in carnality, you are losing time. You are losing rewards. You are working against securing this crown. This is reserved for Christians who have logged maximum time in the spirituality status. Remember that the crown of righteousness goes to Christians who have logged maximum time in the inner circle of spirituality. That's what it's all about. Anytime outside of that is time in carnality. That's the time which is wasted. This is, in effect, for Christians who have a superior level of experiential sanctification.

1. **The Crown of Life**

Crown number three is the crown of life. This is referred to in James 1:12: "Blessed is the man that endures temptation." There is your clue: "For when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love Him." This is also referred to in Revelation 2:10: "Fear none of those things which you shall suffer. Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison that you may be tried, and you shall have tribulation 10 days." There's your clue again: Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life. This crown is associated with honor in heaven for resisting temptation, and enduring terrific trial. It is meeting temptation with a capacity which has been provided by God Himself to the believer.

In 1 Corinthians 10:13, the apostle Paul says, "No temptation has taken you, but such as is common to man. But God is faithful, who will not permit you to be tempted above that you are able; but will, with the temptation, also make the way to escape, that you may be able to bear it." So, there is nothing that comes into your life that is greater than what other people have experienced. God will never give you a temptation that you cannot say "No" to – an evil that you cannot cope with. What we are talking about here is to be victorious in suffering because of spiritual capacity.

In 2 Corinthians 12:9, the apostle Paul, in describing his physical ailment, said, "And He (God) said unto me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.'" Then that famous verse 10 here lists the five facets of the spiritual maturity structure of the soul. Paul says, "Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities; in reproaches; in necessities; in persecution; in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak then I am strong." What Paul is describing there is the spiritual maturity structure in his soul. He says, "That's the point of my strength and of my capacity."

So, when Paul is facing trials like he did with that physical ailment, his spiritual maturity structure carries him through. Be careful when somebody comes up and waves a big fat piece of temptation and opportunity. Don't forget that there are a lot of wonderful Christians walking around who never do certain things, but they don't do those things because they never had a good opportunity to do them. Don't get yourself so arrogant that you think that something is beyond you just because you haven't had an opportunity to be able to indulge a certain sin in some condition of immunity. The crown of life is the crown for those who know how to meet suffering, and who are stable in the face of temptation. This is not a reference to salvation, of course, because you do not earn salvation. This is a crown (an honor) that you earn. There is no human doing involved here. There are no confessions; no sorrows; no rituals; and, no promises. This refers to the capacity for entering what Jesus calls the abundant life in John 10:10.

**Super Abounding Grace**

This refers to that marvelous level of super grace maturity which James 4:6 refers to: "But He gives more grace (the Greek says, 'Super abounding grace'). Therefore, He has said, 'God resists the proud (the negative volition type), but gives grace unto the humble (the positive volition type).'" It is the positive volition believer who takes doctrine into the soul, and builds a spiritual maturity structure to the point where he has the capacity for God to be pouring in what James calls "super abounding grace" so that he joins what the psalmist says: "His cup runneth over."

Only the super grace Christian in this status can live the Christian life with capacity. Only he has the capacity to receive overflowing grace. Bible doctrine alone, not your hustling, gives you super grace capacity. This alone gives it. In John 6:63, we read, "It is the Spirit that gives life. The flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak unto you (doctrine) – they are Spirit, and they are life."

So, what is the crown of life? The crown of life refers to the honor which super grace believers will have in heaven. There are certain Christians who have stayed with learning of doctrine; they have been positive toward it; and, they have developed a spiritual maturity within them that goes all the way to the pinnacle of super grace. No Christian can really live the Christian life until he has come to super grace status. In the natural realm, a child does not have the capacities of the adult. He has all the potential, but until he gets to adulthood, he cannot do certain things that only adults are able to do. So when people do not develop in the Christian life, they cannot do certain things that are only reserved for mature adult believers.

So, only the Christian at super grace can enter what Jesus describes in John as the abundant life. That is the prime of your spiritual life. Super grace status is revealed, then, by the capacity to handle trials; temptations; and, even to go, if necessary, to martyrdom. The word for "life" is this word "zoe." "Zoe" is life as God has it. It represents all of the highest and the best that the believer possesses. It's a joke when the world talks about living with its evil, and they don't know the first thing about life.

So, super grace Christians (at that level) go out into eternity. This is something you take with you. This is one thing you will take with you when you die. You will go into eternity with your super grace status. When you stand before the Lord, you not only get your rewards, but you also get pinned on you the Medal of Honor of the crown of life. It marks those who have been occupied with Christ, and they have matured all the way with doctrine and their response to it. It's victory for progressing. It's victory for being strong after you have arrived at the super grace level. It is capacity for resisting sin, and it's capacity for real living. There is nothing more important than building a super grace level in your life as a believer. That takes time. There are not many people walking around among Christians who are super grace type believers. There are very few. We've got a lot of cocky ones who think they're up there. We've got a lot of those who think that the desire to be there is equivalent to being there. But when we get to heaven, some people are going to have this medal pinned on them, and some people that you think ought to have it (you're going to be surprised) don't come anywhere near it.

For all of you here in this session, you may have the crown of rejoicing for a life of divine good production. You may have the crown of righteousness for a life of maximum compatibility with the holiness of God. You may have a crown of life for maintaining a spiritual maturity structure at prime functioning in your life.

1. **The Crown of Glory**

Then, if you have a certain gift, there is a fourth crown that some of you can have, and that is a crown of glory. This is a crown which is exclusive to those with the gift of pastor-teacher. It is in 1 Peter 5:4 that this is described for us: "And when the chief shepherd shall appear, you shall receive a crown of glory that doesn't fade away." Who are the "you?" Well, we're going to look at the first three verses of 1 Peter 5 to see of whom he speaks: "The elders who are among you I exhort, who also am an elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight of it, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mine; neither by being lords over God's heritage, but being an example unto the flock." He is talking obviously about certain men who have a double gift ability. They can teach the Word of God. They can communicate it so that it is understandable. They have the ability of pastoring. They have the ability of guarding the flock – of spotting the predators in the flock. They have the capacity (the military capacity) to be able to stand up against those who are trying to make inroads against the flock.

These are all masculine terms. There are no women who are eligible for the crown of glory. There are no women preachers, and there are no women pastors. This excludes them completely. So, you female preacher types – don't get your hopes up. This is not a gift, as you read the Scriptures here, that applies to women.

This is a victory wreath to honor pastors who are faithful in doing the mission to which they've been called, which is teaching the Word of God to people. It honors the pastor who functions in accordance with 1 Peter 5:2-3, which talks about feeding the flock of God. They don't do it because they're forced to do it. They don't do it for the money that's in it. They don't do it as lording it over the flock. They are themselves subject to the direction and the decision of that congregation as a whole. But they are examples unto it, and they lead out. Once they are in authority, they are the authority in that local assembly, until that foundation says you're no longer the authority in this local assembly. And while they're in authority, it is incumbent upon them to feed the flock, not with corncobs, but with the real grain that God has for them of the Word of God.

This crown is a Medal of Honor for duty performed. One of the greatest honors you can have in the military service of the United States is to be granted the Congressional Medal of Honor. When they give you that medal, a phrase that is always included as they describe what your act was on the field of battle, is that this was an act that was above and beyond the call of duty. But for a pastor-teacher, this medal is not given because he did something above and beyond the call of duty. It's given because he did that for which he was called to do.

John 21:15: "So, when they had dined, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?' He said unto Him, 'Yea, Lord, You know that I love You.' He said unto him, 'Feed my lambs.'" "Feed my little lambs" is what it says there. So, here's the Lord Jesus in one of the final contacts with His disciples. He says, "Peter, do you really love Me? You talk about loving Me. Do you really love Me?" Peter says, "Yes I do Lord." Then Jesus says, "Then, Peter, if you love Me, I want you to feed my little sheep; my little children; my little kids. I want you to take care of them." What did the Lord mean?

Did He mean, "Peter, I want you to get a wonderful program going for them? I want you to have a marvelous social program for the youth. I want you to have afterglows every Sunday night. I want you to have special events. I want you to have women's clubs and men's clubs. I want you to have bowling teams. I want to have baseball; softball; and, archery clubs. For those who are the more angelic type, I want you to organize a pilot's club for them. I want you to have all these wonderful things so that God's people can really go on there. Then. Peter, I want you to have somebody at the door when people come in – some guy with a nice mouthful-of-teeth smile, and I want him to shake everybody's hands. Tell them how wonderful it is. Tell them that you're the friendliest church in town, and how marvelous it is that you are here, and that they'll never be the same again." That's a Bunco squad, and that isn't what the Lord meant.

The Lord said, "Peter, if you really love Me, get the doctrine of the Word into the hearts of these kids – into these little sheep of Mine; and, into these little lambs." In verse 16, "He said to him again the second time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?' He said, 'Yea, Lord, You know that I love You.' He said unto him, 'Feed my sheep.'" Now he uses a different word. He steps it up, and I'm not going to get into all that's in these verses. I'll just make this point: that Jesus is saying to him, "I want you to feed My people." Verse 17: "He said unto him the third time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?' Peter grieved because He said unto him the third time, 'Do you love Me?' He said unto Him, 'Lord, You know all things. You know that I love You.' Jesus said unto Him, 'Feed my sheep.'" Again Jesus says, "Feed these who are dear to Me – the people of your congregation."

That's what the Lord Jesus said. But today there is such monumental unfaithfulness of local churches; of denominational groups; and, of preachers who are more interested in a power structure than they are in fulfilling the calling that is theirs in the Word of God, that I have it on good authority that there is a surplus of crowns of glory medals in heaven, that the Lord isn't going to be able to give out, because there are so few preachers who are standing up and doing the job of teaching their people the doctrines of the Word of God. They are not just telling them these cute little stories about David and this terrible 13-foot giant that was out there waving his sword and making smart-alec remarks, and how this kid flung his little slingshot, and hit this guy in the middle of the forehead, and all these stories. That's not what we're talking about. We're talking about saying, "Alright, people, in 21 points, we're now going to summarize the doctrine of redemption. In 35 points, we're going to summarize the doctrine of the blood of Christ. Point number one: ..." So, suddenly, from all directions of Scripture, there comes an understanding of truth upon which a person can function.

When our nation faces military disaster; when our nation faces economic disaster (and it's just over the horizon); and, when our nation's faces national crises, it is the Christians who are steeped in doctrine who are going to survive. The rest of them are going to fall to their knees, screeching like a bunch of yellow-bellies, but there are going to be Christians who know the Word of God who are going to survive in times of crises. The reason they're going to do it is because some preacher is going to get the crown of glory, because he prepared them, as soldiers of Jesus Christ, for the spiritual combat, and the consequences in the physical realm of a nation that violates the principles of the Word of God.

The ideal is in Acts 20:26. This is one of the greatest passages any preacher could ever recite. The apostle Paul could say it. He is meeting with the pastor-teachers from all over the city of Ephesus. They're down there on the beach. He's about to embark for Jerusalem. He is telling them something here that comes as a shock to them – that they are never going to see him again. In the process of preparing these men to take over the work that he will never be back to supervise again, Paul says, "Wherefore I testify unto you this day that I am pure from the blood of all men." What does he mean by that? "No man's blood is on my hands, for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." That's what he means: "I am free of the blood of every believer," and they've been talking about Christians in this context:

"There is no guilt upon me for what happens to any believer who has ever come under the sound of my voice, because I have given him the full counsel of the Word of God. He did not come to church every Sunday and hear one message: the gospel. He heard everything that the Word of God had to say. He understands dispensations. He understands pre-millennialism. He understands the difference between Israel and the church. He understands the distinctiveness of being a believer. He understands what it means to be in Christ. He understands the baptism of the Holy Spirit. He understands the functioning of spiritual gifts. He understands how to store treasures in heaven that will affect the quality of his eternity. He understands all the full counsel of God. He knows where the world is going, because the prophetic Scriptures have not been kept a closed book to him. I have not shunned to declare unto you the full counsel of God." If a preacher can really say that, he's a pretty good candidate for the crown of glory.

"Take me therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers – to feed the church of God." Can it be clearer? What must go on in the brains of preachers who read this? Can it be any clearer? Here is this man that's going to die? They're never going to see him again. He's leaving the work, and what's he going to say? He's going to say the most important thing that has to be said if the Christians are going to survive, and the church is going to survive. What does he say? "Teach them doctrine. Feed the church of God, which He has purchased with His own blood. I am free of the blood of all men." The pastor-teacher who can say that will find himself with a crown of glory, an honor of victory in heaven, because of the way he dealt with his flock. It honors the pastors who are not sidetracked from teaching the Word, and to all the other things that preachers can be sidetracked with.

People can put pressures on the pastor and the congregation to do all kinds of things. They want to make him the social butterfly, and they want to make him all kinds of things other than a student and a teacher of the Word, which is the only thing that's going to matter to them 100 years from now.

I hope you will ask yourselves that when you make decisions. I cannot believe, even among our own group, the decisions that people periodically make relative to themselves and to their children, and I can just know that they didn't say to themselves, "What is the consequence 100 years from now? I see people who don't send their children to vacation Bible school because they make a substitute choice that isn't going to amount to a hill of beans 100 years from now. They keep their children out of summer camp so that they can participate in some kind of activity that is zero in terms of that kid's future. That is disorientation of the worst kind. But if they do it, at least they should do it because they're doing it in spite of knowledge, and in spite of knowing better. Parents are permitting their children to make choices that they're not equipped and mature enough and able to make.

I also see parents who do the other thing. I see parents who are so eager to have their children involved. They're coming up to me and they're saying, "Hey, would you give a little word of encouragement? I want my son to do this. I want my daughter to do this." Then I say, "OK," and the next time I see that kid, I give him a big speech and I give him a big inspiration talk on something. The parents come back and said, "Oh, boy, he did it. He's doing this thing," and they're delighted. They're seeing their children go in the direction of the things of God. These are choices that matter 100 years from now. One parent will regret it, and another parent will thank God for it.

It's hard for me not to say that some of these parents just stand by. You're ready for some grief. Your sweet little kid that you're teaching to make substitutes of other things that are not going to amount to anything in the long-range for the things of God that count for something now – he's going to get the taste for that, and the time will come when you will see him drift away from the things of God, and you will have cause to regret it.

A lot of pastor-teachers are, at heart, guilty of that. These pastors generally do not have a glorious reputation and status on the earth, but they will in heaven. They're not often praised and honored by their flock, but they are going to be praised and honored by the Lord with His crown. What difference does it make if the people of your congregation go out after a service and say, "Very wonderful sermon, your excellency?" That doesn't mean anything. But for the Lord to say it, now that means something.

So, in the book of the Revelation, the Lord Jesus Christ has hit on crowns twice. He says here, "Be careful. Don't lose your opportunity for a Medal of Honor. It will make a difference in terms of your eternity. You can receive a crown of rejoicing because of your positive volition reception to the Word of God and your divine good production. You can receive a crown of righteousness because of godliness and compatible living. How can you learn to be godly if you don't know Scripture, so that you know how to live according to the precepts of the Word of God? You can receive a crown of life because you built a spiritual maturity structure in your soul, and you stayed up there, and you weren't a spiritual yo-yo up and down. You may be able to receive a crown of glory, for those of you who have the gift and the responsibility of pastor-teacher, because you fed the flock upon the full counsel of the Word of God, and not on the corn husks and the shredded nothingness – the lack of nutrition of the human viewpoint that is so often put out through the pulpit. One of those (more than one), and maybe all four can be yours. It will make a difference in your eternity, and you should not take it lightly.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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