

## 1 Corinthians 4:5

*1 Corinthians 4:5 . . . wait until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of people's hearts; and then each one's praise will come to him from God.*

This verse concludes Paul's comments about Jesus' future evaluation of our service for Him (see 1 Corinthians 3:10 – 4:5). He emphasizes that this evaluation will not be for the purpose of deciding our salvation: "If anyone's work is burned up (on that day), he will suffer loss (of reward), but *he himself will be saved.*" Our salvation is a free gift, paid for in full through Jesus' death for our sins, and received by simply entrusting ourselves to Jesus.

No, Jesus will evaluate the quality of our service for Him after we have received Him, so that He may reward us. What amazing grace! Jesus not only laid down His life to pay for our entry into His kingdom (even though we deserve God's condemnation); He will also reward us for our imperfect attempts to serve Him!

How will Jesus reward His servants? The New Testament gives us many answers to this question, and this passage gives us two hints. In 3:13, Paul says that on that day, "each person's work will become *evident.*" In this life, we can know through Scripture how to serve God, but we cannot accurately assess the impact of our service for Him. We share our faith, we build up other believers, we pray for others' needs, etc. – but we receive only occasional, fragmentary glimpses of the impact of our service. But on that day, God will make it *evident* to us. We will see with perfect clarity its full ripple-effect, and we will experience the satisfaction and joy that comes from knowing that our service pleased God (Matthew 25:21,23). As C. S. Lewis said:



“Nothing is so obvious in a child . . . the satisfaction of having pleased those whom he has rightly loved and (respected) . . . And that is enough to raise our thoughts to what may happen when (we), beyond all hope and nearly beyond belief, at last learn that (we have) pleased Him whom (we were) created to please . . . With no taint of . . . (prideful) self-approval (we) will most innocently rejoice in the thing that God has made (us) to be . . . (This) moment will forever drown (both our) inferiority complex (and our) pride . . . To please God . . . to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness . . . it seems impossible, a weight of glory which our thoughts can barely sustain. But so it is.”<sup>1</sup>

Paul gives us another glimpse of our heavenly reward in 4:5. When we read that the Lord will “bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of people’s hearts,” we instinctively cringe. We think of all the shameful things we hid, and all the times that we served God for selfish motives. But this is not what Paul is talking about. True, we all have many sins like these – but they are permanently forgiven through Christ, and we are freed forever from their guilt and shame. Paul says earlier that God will mercifully burn these things up. I’m sure my fire on that day will be a bonfire, and good riddance to it! No, Paul is speaking here about the ways we served God in secret (which we may have even forgotten), and about the times when we served Him simply because we loved Him. The Lord will bring all of *these things* to light – and then the One who deserves our praise will praise us! He will utter the words “Well done, good and faithful servant” to each of us, because each true child of God has served Him in some way.

That Jesus will one day evaluate our service makes our entire Christian lives meaningful. Even late in our lives, we can still choose to serve God – maybe by laboring in intercessory prayer, maybe by showing kindness to our neighbor, maybe by investing in our

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<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1974), pp. 9,10.



grandchildren, maybe by sharing Christ with a relative. And these choices will have an eternal significance because God takes note of every one of them, and because He will one day reward us for them!

*Lord, thank You for your incredible grace through Your Son Jesus Christ! You give me, a sinful person, the inestimable gift of eternal life in Your kingdom. That gift alone is beyond all I could ask or think. But then You also promise to reward me for my imperfect service during this life! Work through this amazing promise to motivate me to serve You **today** with a glad heart.*

