

Ryrie, C. C. (1995, c1972). *A survey of Bible doctrine*.
THE JUDGMENT OF BELIEVERS' WORKS

After the church is taken to heaven through translation and resurrection, individual believers will be judged for their works done as Christians (1 Co 3:11–15). Salvation with its assurance of heaven is not in question, only whether heaven will be entered with or without rewards. Paul makes it quite clear in this passage that those believers whose works are of the character that they do not pass the test will nevertheless be saved (v. 15). The question is often raised how one's sins can be forgiven and yet one's deeds reviewed at the judgment seat of Christ. Forgiveness concerns justification; the review concerns rewards, and after the review is made there will be no sorrow or tears because there are none in heaven. Too, we often wonder what the nature of the rewards will be. If heaven is heaven, what difference will rewards make? The answer to that is not given in the Bible; nevertheless, rewards are mentioned as a proper motivation for Christian service. We are told for what things rewards will be given. A crown of rejoicing will be given for bringing people to Christ (1 Th 2:19); a crown of righteousness, for loving His appearing (2 Ti 4:8); a crown of life, for enduring testing with love for the Lord (Ja 1:12), and a crown of glory to elders who are faithful to their responsibilities in the church (1 Pe 5:4).

Wuest, K. S. (1997, c1984). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament : For the English reader.*

About Crowns

It Surprises one to see how much of the life and speech-expressions of the first century is reflected in the statements found in the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. The writers under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 2:13) constantly draw from contemporary life as they seek to bring to man the message of God. To understand something of first century life and its use of words, is to have a clearer understanding of the message they bring. That is why a knowledge of the Greek language, and a study of the early secular manuscripts, is of great help in the explanation of the New Testament.

The one English word “crown” is used to translate two Greek words, each of which speaks of a different kind of crown, both of them being in common use in the first century in connection with the daily life of the people. To understand their difference and significance as they are related to the local customs, is to come into a fuller, clearer appreciation of those passages in the New Testament which contain them.

One of the words is *stephanos* (στέφανος). It was the crown giver to the victor in the Greek athletic games, the runner who first crossed the goal, the athlete who hurled the discus farthest, the wrestler who pinned his opponent to the mat. It was given to the servant of the State whose work deserved to be honored. It was worn at marriage feasts. A *stephanos* (στέφανος) was therefore a symbol of victory, of deserved honor, and of festal gladness. The crown was woven of oak leaves, of ivy, of parsley, of myrtle, of olive, of violets, of roses.

The inscriptions give us concrete instances of its use. The emperor Claudius acknowledges the golden *stephanos* (στέφανος) sent him by the Worshipful Gymnastic Club of Nomads on the occasion of his victory over the Britons. An inscription of a.d. 138–161 may refer to this club, where “allowances” are made to an athlete on account of his “athletic *stephanos* (στέφανος).”

The word was used in the sense of a reward other than a crown. An inscription of 2 b.c., speaks of Peteuris, who promises a reward (*stephanos* (στέφανος)) of five talents of copper, on account of some special service. The verb form of the noun *stephanos* (στέφανος) is found in a manuscript of 257 b.c., in which a certain Hierokles writes to Zenon regarding a boy who is Zenon’s nominee in the athletic games, “I hope that you will be crowned (i.e., be victorious) through him.”

To us today, a crown is just a crown. The English word usually brings to our minds the picture of a large golden crown set with jewels, such as is or was worn by the crowned heads of Europe. But to impose this conception upon the passages in the New Testament where the word *stephanos* (στέφανος) is found, is to misconstrue and at the same time lose some precious truth. But when the first century reader found that word in the holy Scriptures, he recognized it as a word familiar to him by reason of its association in the ordinary secular life by which he was always surrounded. Thus he understood the full implication of this secular word brought over into the sacred text of the new Faith that was sweeping the Roman empire. And this ability to understand a word like this was not confined merely to the native Greek speaking population of

the empire, for the Roman world was as to its culture, predominantly Grecian. The Greek language was the international language. There was more Greek spoken than Latin.

The other word translated “crown” is *diadema* (διαδεμα), from which we get our word “diadem.” This Greek word is derived from a verb meaning “to bind around.” It referred to a blue band of ribbon marked with white which the Persian kings used to bind on a turban or tiara. It was the kingly ornament for the head, and signified royalty. A *stephanos* (στεφανος) is therefore a victor’s crown, whereas a *diadema* (διαδεμα) is a royal crown. We will study those passages in which each one is found.

Paul in I Corinthians 9:24–27 is speaking of Christian service in a context of Christian service that takes in the entire chapter. In verse 24, he is using the foot races held in the Greek athletic games as an illustration of the activity of a Christian in his work for the Lord. He uses the same illustration borrowed from contemporary life in Philippians 3:7–14, where he speaks, not of Christian service but of progress in the living of a Christlike life. He says that the Greek athletes run a race in order to obtain a corruptible *stephanos* (στεφανος) of oak leaves that soon will wither and fade. But he speaks of a *stephanos* (στεφανος) which a Christian receives as a reward for his services, as an incorruptible crown. Then he tells us that he buffets his body and makes it his slave in order that after preaching to others he might not be a castaway. The word “castaway” comes from a Greek word which means, “to be put to the test and after being tested, to be rejected because of not meeting that test.” Paul draws this word from the Greek games where it was a technical expression meaning “to disqualify a runner from competing for the *stephanos* (στεφανος) because he broke the training rules.” If Paul did not practice what he preached, he would be disqualified, not allowed to compete for the crown given to those who rendered Christian service. He was afraid his apostleship would be taken away and given to another. The first century reader, having the historical background of the Greek games in his mind, would interpret this passage correctly. He would understand that Paul is not speaking of his eternal salvation here, for rewards are in view, and salvation is a gift. The same can be said of Philippians 3:7–14, where sanctification is referred to, not justification. It is the victor’s crown won through Christian service which Paul wants to win.

In Philippians 4:1, Paul calls the Philippian saints his crown. As oak leaves were woven together to form a *stephanos* (στεφανος), a chaplet or garland of victory or of civic worth, so Paul says in effect, “You Philippians are woven together into my crown of victor, an eternal symbol of my victory over the hosts of Satan at Philippi, and my reward for service in that place.” He speaks of the Thessalonian saints whom he also won to the Lord as his *stephanos* (στεφανος) of rejoicing. He will wear a victor’s crown at the coming of the Lord Jesus for the saints, his converts composing a more beautiful festal garland than ever graced the brow of a Greek athlete, even though that *stephanos* (στεφανος) were made of roses or violets (I Thes. 2:19).

In II Timothy 4:8 we have the crown of righteousness. The imagery is again that of the Greek games. “I have fought” not “a good fight,” but “the good fight.” The indefinite article would indicate egotism on the part of the apostle. The definite article is used in the Greek, pointing to the good fight which each Christian is expected to wage. The picture here is taken from the Greek stadium where the huge crowd of spectators is keenly watching two Greek athletes as they

engage perhaps in a wrestling contest. Here is not a race, but a tremendous contest of strength competing with strength. The words “fought” and “fight” come from the same Greek root. We get our word “agony” from this word. It refers to a contest in which the participants exert their strength to the point of agony. What for? For a *stephanos* (στέφανος) of oak leaves that will shortly fade away, and for the plaudits of a fickle crowd that may the next moment turn thumbs down. How this should convict us of laziness, indolence, laxness in Christian service. The word “good” is from the Greek word meaning “goodness as seen from the outside by a spectator,” in contrast to another word which speaks of internal intrinsic goodness. The Greek spectators would say, “That was a beautiful display of skill and strength.” Paul says that the Christian life as it is related to the antagonism of the powers of evil, should display a beauty of skill and spiritual strength that will glorify the Lord Jesus. Such a battle he waged. Notice in passing, if you will, the composition of that word, “antagonism,” from our word “agony,” and “*anti* (ἀντι)” which comes from the Greek, meaning “against.” That is, an antagonist is one who fights against one to the point of agony.

But Paul also says, “I have finished my course.” The word “course” is from the Greek word meaning “a racecourse,” here used in connection with foot races. It is the “cinder-path” of college athletic fields. The word “finished” means “to come to the end.” It is in the perfect tense in the Greek which speaks of a past completed action with present existing results. Paul, awaiting martyrdom in Rome, looks back upon his life as a runner who, having won his race, is resting at the goal and is looking back down the cinder path over which he sped to victory, and sees the race as over, and its result, the *stephanos* (στέφανος) of righteousness awaiting him.

The crowds leave the Greek stadium after the games are over, and the victors crowned with a garland of oak-leaves, are carried on the shoulders of rejoicing friends. So some day, the saints will leave the stadium of this life’s battles, and in heaven will rejoice with each other over the crowns they have won through the wonderful grace of God.

In James 1:12 we have the *stephanos* (στέφανος) of life. “Blessed” is literally in this context, “spiritually prosperous.” “Temptation” is from a Greek word which has two meanings, to be used according to the context in which the word may be found. It means either “to put one to a test” as in Genesis 22:1 where God tempted Abraham, that is, tested him to see whether he would be obedient in relation to the request that he sacrifice his son (Septuagint, Greek translation of Old Testament), or “to solicit one to do evil,” as in our context in James.

The word “endureth” is literally “to remain under,” and must be interpreted in its context, namely, the word “tried.” The word “tried” is from a technical Greek expression found in an early manuscript, where it referred to the action of an examining board putting its approval upon those who had successfully passed the examinations for the degree of Doctor of Medicine. The verb means “to test for the purpose of approving,” the noun, “the approved character of the one who has successfully met the test.”

Here is a child of God who has been solicited to do evil. He has successfully met the test by refusing to sin. That is what James means by “enduring temptation.” The “*stephanos* (στέφανος) of the life” is his reward. This is not eternal life. He has that already, or he could not have overcome temptation. Furthermore, this is a reward given in recognition of what the believer has done, whereas salvation is a free gift given in view of what Christ has done on the Cross. The article in the Greek before “life,” points to a particular kind of life, here to that eternal

life which is in Christ Jesus which enabled the believer to overcome temptation. Thus, this crown is a *stephanos* (στέφανος) given in recognition of the believer's victory over sin, that victory having been procured by means of the eternal life he has, and which energizes his being.

When we come to Peter's use of *stephanos* (στέφανος) in his first epistle (5.4), we have another illustration of how Greek culture had stamped itself upon the life of the Roman world. Peter knew Greek, but he had not lived in a Greek city such as Tarsus, the home of the apostle Paul. He was not schooled in Greek learning as was Paul. Yet this fisherman, reared in a Jewish environment, engaged in the fishing trade around the Sea of Galilee, was conversant enough with the life about and beyond his little world, that he used a typical illustration from a phase of first century life of which he as a Jew was not a part. The same can be said of John, and also of James the brother of our Lord, for they also use *stephanos* (στέφανος).

John, writing from the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea to the church at Smyrna, a city which was in a region where Greek culture predominated, exhorts the Christians there who were undergoing severe persecutions, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the *stephanos* (στέφανος) of the life." The word "unto" does not mean "until." The same Greek word is used in Philippians 2:8, where our Lord was obedient "up to the point" or "to the extent" of death. This Smyrna church represents the "Martyr Period" of church history, from a.d. 100–316 when ten bloody persecutions were hurled at the Christian church by Rome. This is the victor's crown given to those who are martyrs to the Faith once for all delivered to the saints. The word "martyr" comes from the Greek word meaning "to bear witness to." These Christians bore witness to the Christian faith by death (Rev. 2:10). It is touching to know that the name of the first recorded Christian martyr was Stephen, which comes from *stephanos* (στέφανος).

The Philadelphian church saints are exhorted to hold fast the little spiritual strength which they have (Rev. 3:11), lest they lose their *stephanos* (στέφανος), namely, their victor's crown, a reward for service. The elders (Rev. 4:4, 10) representing the redeemed in heaven, are seen, each with a golden *stephanos* (στέφανος) on their heads. Sometimes a *stephanos* (στέφανος) of gold, made in the form of an oak leaf garland for instance, was used in the first century. We saw that in the case of the golden *stephanos* (στέφανος) given to the emperor Claudias. Here the glorified saints wear such a victor's crown, but not for long, for, overcome with gratitude, they cast their victor's crowns at the feet of the One who through His victory at Calvary gave them the grace to overcome in their own lives.

There are two riders on white horses in the Revelation, one in chapter 6:2, Antichrist, and the other, chapter 19:11, Jesus Christ. To Antichrist there is given a *stephanos* (στέφανος), the victor's crown. He goes forth conquering and to conquer. The superhuman beings of Revelation 9:7 have victor's crowns on their heads. The woman clothed with the sun, representing Israel, has a *stephanos* (στέφανος) made of stars, indicative of Israel's final victory over Satan and persecuting Antichrist when Jesus Christ comes to its rescue. Then in Revelation 14:14, we have the Lord Jesus with a victor's crown on His head, coming in His second Advent to conquer Antichrist and set up His kingdom.

The verb form of the noun *stephanos* (στέφανος) is used in II Timothy 2:5. Paul uses the illustrations of a soldier in verses 3 and 4, of an athlete in verse 5, and of a farmer in verse 6. In

verse 5 the words “strive for masteries” is from a word which comes into our language in the word “athlete.” It means “to exert one’s self in a contest as an athlete, for a prize or reward.” “Is crowned” is from our word “*stephanos* (στέφανος),” “is crowned with a victor’s crown.” The same verb is used in Hebrews 2:7, 9, where we see the Son of Man, made for a little time lower than the angels, now in His glorified state, crowned with the garland of victory.

What shall we say when we come to the *stephanos* (στέφανος) of thorns which the soldiers placed on the head of our Lord (Matt. 27:29; Mark 15:17; John 19:2, 5)? While there is an instance where the word *stephanos* (στέφανος) is used to signify royalty, as in “the crown-tax,” yet its predominant usage was that of a victor’s crown. The other word *diadema* (διαδεμα) which refers to a royal crown, could hardly be used here, for it referred to a narrow ribbon-like band worn around the head. The crown of thorns was of inter-woven material like the *stephanos* (στέφανος) of oak leaves or ivy, and this word was probably chosen for that reason. But what the soldiers meant in mockery for a royal crown, became for our Lord in the hour of seeming defeat, the victor’s crown, for Paul could write (I Cor. 15:55) “Where, O death is your victory? Where, O death ^{*} is your sting?” The victor’s crown was placed on His brow before the victory was complete. So sure was the victory of the Cross. So sure will be the victory procured at the Cross for you and for me who are trusting in the Saviour’s precious blood poured out at Calvary as the God-appointed substitutionary atonement for sin.

The other word translated “crown” is *diadema* (διαδεμα). It comes from a verb which means “to bind around.” It referred to the narrow blue band of ribbon marked with white which the Persian kings used to bind on a turban or tiara. It was the kingly ornament for the head. Sometimes more than one *diadema* (διαδεμα) was worn at the same time. When Ptolemy, king of Egypt entered Antioch in triumph, he set two crowns on his head, the *diadema* (διαδεμα) showing his sovereignty over Asia, and the *diadema* (διαδεμα) speaking of his kingly authority over Egypt (I Maccabees, XI 13).

Satan (Rev. 12:3) has seven *diadema* (διαδεμα) on his head, showing his close connection with and supremacy over the seven Roman emperors of Revelation 17:10. These are royal crowns, indicating imperial authority over the Revived Roman empire. Antichrist (Rev. 13:1) has ten kingly crowns upon his head, showing his sovereignty over the ten kings and their kingdoms in the Revived Roman empire (Rev. 17:12, 13). The Lord Jesus (Rev. 19:12), when He comes to bring in the Messianic Kingdom which will be world-wide, will wear many crowns. To one whose conception of a crown is limited to that of a large golden crown studded with jewels, this statement is unintelligible. But when one understands that these crowns consist of narrow bands of ribbon encircling the head at the forehead, one can appreciate the description. These *diadema* (διαδεμα) represent all the kingdoms and other political units over which the Lord Jesus will rule as supreme Sovereign. He will truly be King of kings and Lord of lords.

*The best texts read “death” not “grave.”