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## NT 15 – Crown Incorruptible

If you're just stumbling upon this, or if this is the first session you're listening to, let me again introduce myself. This is Michael Northrup. Here in Rio Verde, Arizona, this series of online teachings began last June. I started with the Old Testament. We did 33 sessions on the Old Testament. Eventually, we will return to that and finish it—we are not finished learning from the successes and failures of the Old Testament Kings. However, I felt it was necessary to look at the New Testament since we don't want to end up like those Old Testament kings who went astray and got into all kinds of trouble.

### The Reflexives in the New Testament are Exemplified by the Five Crowns

Within the New Testament we have been looking at reflexives: the things that we individually are commanded to do as we imitate Christ. An example of a reflexive is, "he humbled himself." We are to humble ourselves as well as instructed in I Peter 5. [You humble yourselves.]

#### **I Peter 5:6,7**

**6** Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, **7** casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

Today we are going to look at I Corinthians 9 concerning the first of the five crowns. Our wider topic is the reflexives. The rewards in the New Testament which are exemplified and signified by the five crowns relate really well with the commands inherent in the reflexives.

In the last session, I gave my thesis:

**The crowns cumulatively represent the fullness of the rewards available to the disciple as outlined by Christ and then detailed by the commands inherent in the reflexives of the New Testament.**

We are going to look at the five crowns and cumulatively see in the five crowns what is required to receive the rewards. We will see that they are commanded in the reflexives.

I appreciate the feedback I have received. This series is really the "meat" of the Word. It is for disciples and those who seek to be disciples. It is for those who are really interested in growing to maturity in Christ and being transformed to become Christlike. And of course, as we're seeing now, also being rewarded for it for eternity. All of this, of course, is the big message of the Word.

Beginning with Genesis 3:15 and the fall of man and the necessity for a savior, we see that everything really is about Christ. In the beginning, starting with Genesis 3:15, it was prophesied that the Messiah is going to come.

#### **Genesis 3:15**

**15** I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

All of biblical history is about Christ. There is a chosen people, so that there are people to whom the Christ would come. There is a promised land to which the Christ could come. There was the

first coming of Christ and what he did recorded in the gospels, and there's the Pentecost event when Christ sent his gift of holy spirit, which is Christ in us, the hope of glory. And then of course, Christ is going to return.

We are seeking to paint a picture of what Christ's likeness is like. We see it in the Gospels as Christ was here in the flesh. We see it inherent in the commands that he gave. Then we see it lived out in the Book of Acts because they understood the mystery revealed in the epistles and they lived it out. All of this fits together cohesively. We are going to see how the five crowns also fit cohesively into God's plan. My intent here is to share, so we get a better grasp of this, understand God's true heart and expectations for us, and glorify him.

This question was posed by a listener:

[Is it the heart behind the work, or is it your natural ability? Or is it the amount of work that you do that results in rewards?](#)

This is great question. It is certainly not our natural ability. It is because believers have Christ in them that they can do the work that results in rewards. As Christ said, we can do nothing without him.

#### **John 15:5**

[5](#) I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, **for apart from me you can do nothing.**

It's not like we can't go to the grocery store and get groceries without him. It's that we can't do anything of any spiritual significance with spiritual fruit without Christ. We need to abide in him it says in John 15, and it's not traditionally the amount of work. This isn't works-based salvation. This isn't a focus on works. **It is the heart that we need to have in order to be given rewards.** We're going to see that as it's detailed not only in the crowns but in the reflexives.

Another person's comment was on Matthew 20 and the laborers saying, it's not the amount of work, but the acceptance of the promise given, saying, this gives me hope, even though I don't have great ability, I may still receive a crown if the work done is with the right heart. Absolutely. We are going to see a great deal of focus on godliness and righteousness and holiness that will result in rewards.

#### **Meat Not Milk**

I mentioned this subject is the meat of God's Word and not milk. Look at I Corinthians 2:14–3:4. These are spiritual matters which are to be understood spiritually and with the spirit of God in us. It is not for the immature.

#### **I Corinthians 2:14**

[14](#) The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. [15](#) The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. [16](#) "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

Because we have the spirit of God in us and the mind of Christ in us that enables God to teach us as we hear the Word and read the Word, so we understand it.

We don't want to be fleshly, carnal, or immature. This goes on in chapter three,

**1 Corinthians 3:1-4**

**1** But I, brothers,<sup>a</sup> could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ.

We certainly don't want to be infants in Christ. We want to grow up.

**2** I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, **3** for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?

This is how most people act, think, believe, interact, proceed in their daily lives in a human way.

**4** For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human?

Most people would respond and say, well, aren't we all humans? Of course I'm merely human, but this is spiritual knowledge from God, which we can hear with our ears and process with our minds. Because we have the spirit of God in us, he will enlighten our understanding, and that is our goal as we go through this.

I'm very passionate about this study because I believe this all fits with the concept of true, genuine discipleship and Christlikeness. I believe it will help each one of us in our growth.

The end goal is Christlikeness. The whole Bible is about Christ, and we know the end, that we are going to be conformed to his image. But while we're here, we really can walk as Christ did.

**1 John 2:6**

**6** whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

**1 Peter 4:1**

**1** Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,

This says we are to think in the same way, to have the same mind and perspective. The Gospels give us the picture of Christ, and then we have been equipped with Christ in us. We get the doctrine of how to be Christlike from the Epistles. We also have the examples of Paul, Peter, James, John in the book of Acts. These rewards and these crowns align with how we're supposed to walk.

**Rationalizations of Why I Can't Become Christlike**

For those who have been at this a while, the tendency may be to think, okay, I've been a Christian for a long time; I've tried and failed so many times to be Christlike; I've really given up.

Or others would say, I'm really not interested in this. There's too many fun, entertaining things to do in the world and pursue other things, like Demas in 2 Timothy 4.

Others might say, well, I just don't understand how I can actually be transformed. This is just who I am, the way I am as a result of my upbringing, etcetera. There are so many objections people can have.

## It is Possible To Become Christlike – God Works in Us as We Work

This is the high calling of walking worthy. And again, it's possible. And we can get to the place where we realize, hey, I can do this because of the spirit of God and the Word of God.

### **Philippians 3:14-16**

**14** I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. **15** Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. **16** Only let us hold true to what we have attained

It is good always to be on the alert and look out for patterns in the Word. I mentioned last time how all the promises made by God in the Old Testament were fulfilled. Joshua recognized that. And of course, Christ and Paul and Peter, reading the Old Testament, recognized that.

Another example came to mind this week and that was Jeremiah 29. The Children of Israel were in exile, but it was a promise that it would only be for 70 years. It caused me to think of the pattern in the Word and for all of life, really, beginning with Eden. There was Eden, things were great. Then there was the fall, and then all of history is leading to the restoration of Eden again. And that, of course, is the big picture from beginning to end.

But you think about Israel in the promised land—sin, fall, captivity. But then they were restored to the promised land. A few sessions ago we looked at Nebuchadnezzar on being exalted and humbled, and he was the king of the world. And then because of sin and pride, he fell. However, because he repented and humbled himself, he was restored.

So, we see these patterns. Consider the Book of Judges, for example. After Joshua led the children of Israel into the promised land, he passed away. They're fine in Israel at first. Then they sin and consequences follow, and then they're oppressed and they cry out, God raises a leader. They're restored. And then the same pattern continues.

Well, it can happen in our lives as well. Where things are great, we get a little lazy, issues arise, we suffer consequences, so we call out to God, and then he restores us. What a wonderful, loving, compassionate, merciful God we have.

## The Word "Hope" in God's Word

And I talked last time about the hope and what we're looking forward to. I think it's interesting to note that of the 160 plus occurrences of the Word hope in the Bible, there's only one in the Gospels. And I began to think, well, why is that? Because in the Old Testament, what was their hope? That the Messiah/Christ would come. In the gospels he was there! So, they're not talking about the hope. The kingdom of heaven is among you, he said, but then he teaches them that, look, I'm going to be coming back, and you need to be living in accordance with discipleship commands because there's an eternity to come.

## Christ's Many Rewards for His Obedience and Sacrifice

Christ, of course, was rewarded for what he did. If you study in depth the cumulative requirements for the crowns, it paints a picture of Christlike discipleship. But then we can see that for what he did, he was individually rewarded. In the same way, what we do will be rewarded. Let's look at Revelation. Here's another one of those patterns where God, because

he's a just God, because of what's done in accordance with his will, there is then a reward for it. And this is very simple and straightforward.

#### **Revelation 4:11**

**11** "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

Why is God worthy of our glory and honor and power? He created all things, and by His will they existed and were created. So here it's saying that God is worthy to receive glory, honor and power because of what he did for us.

Of course, he's always worthy of honor and glory and power

In Revelation 5 the question is, who is worthy to open up the scroll and break its seals? And John began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll.

#### **Revelation 5:2-5**

**2** And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" **3** And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, **4** and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. **5** And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."

So, who is worthy to open the scroll? It's the one who was victorious—accomplished what he was sent to do. He conquered. So, because of that, he was rewarded. He was able to open the seven seals.

**9** And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, **10** and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."

So again, we see God was worthy. Christ was worthy. Because as we read in Philippians 2, he humbled himself. He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God.

**12** saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"

It's very simple. Because Christ did exactly what he was commissioned, assigned, sent to do, obedient unto death, even death of the cross, then he was worthy to receive. What did he get as a reward? Power, wealth, wisdom, might, honor, glory, blessing.

Well, in the same way, down in verse 13,

**13** And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" **14** And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.

We talked last time about our eternal status. We're talking about eternal rewards because of what we do in this life. And we talked earlier about Christ when he was young. He learned, Christ learned, and then he earned his rewards. We learn, and then we also earn.

**Philippians 2:9**

[9](#) Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,

He was awarded a name above every name because he accomplished what he was sent to do.

**Colossians 3:1**

[1](#) If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Christ was rewarded with a seat at the right hand of God.

He's the king over his kingdom. He is the head of the body of Christ. He's going to be the ruler of the Millennial Kingdom. These are all the things awarded to Christ because of what he accomplished. He now makes intercession for the saints. That is a function he performs.

**Hebrews 7:25 26**

[26](#) For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. [27](#) He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. [28](#) For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

He was made high priest forever! So the rewards are eternal, which is why we want to know what they are and how to receive them. And that's what we're endeavoring to do.

Christ leads the way in all of these things. All the reflexives that we'll read are things that Christ did. He was at all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin, so we learn from him. He's our example.

Another of Christ's rewards is stated in Ezekiel 40–48 which details the setup of the land of Israel in the Millennial Kingdom. These chapters speak of the new temple, the new Jerusalem. And if you have an ESV study bible, you can see the temple vision that was given to Ezekiel. It discusses the glory of God filling the temple and goes on about the layout of the land and the different tribes and the allotment of the land to each tribe and the different boundaries.

Within Jerusalem, there's a section of the prince's land on either side. Well, who is the prince and who's going to have the prince's land? That is going to be the Christ. So, another reward for the Christ for what he did are those swaths of land adjacent to Jerusalem.

[The Crowns Intersect and Must Be Considered Collectively Painting A Picture of True Discipleship](#)

As we study the crowns it is important to view them collectively and not individually or separately because they all intersect with one another. I'm going to build this case as we proceed. They are not separate crowns. "Oh, I got this crown. Oh, you got that crown. I got half a crown for this."

The crowns are recognition for a discipleship life that looks like Christ. God and Christ have given in the Word standards to be met. By meeting those standards, you are rewarded. It is not cut and dried because they all intersect. I will explain and illustrate these intersections shortly.

It can be compared to a boss telling you, okay, here are the standards, and you'll be rewarded for following them. Very simply, God is the boss. Christ is the boss. We have our job description of what qualifies as genuine discipleship. There is a collective group of rewards that are "on the table" for obedience to the discipleship standards.

We endeavored to paint the picture of Christ in the Gospels, and the picture of how to be Christlike in the Epistles when we studied Transformation last spring. Because of that, we seek to look at the Word as a whole message. The gospel is the whole message of the life of Christ, the Epistles relay the whole message of discipleship.

So, with rewards the same way, it's a big picture and it's cumulative and it enables us to see what we're supposed to be doing. It paints a picture of true discipleship because each one of these crowns hearkens back to the attributes of a disciple.

### I Corinthians 9 – The Incorruptible Crown

I encourage you to read the whole context on your own. We start in verse 16.

#### **I Corinthians 9:16**

**16** For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! **17** For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship.

He's talking about rewards. There is one stipulation here. We do things lovingly and by free will out of gratitude for God. And when we do that, and if we do that, we have a reward.

Well, we'll go to verse 19.

**19** For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.

We have a reflexive here: "I have made myself" a servant to all. Paul, by his free will, made himself a servant to all. In the context here we are going to see what is needed to receive a reward.

So down in verse 24.

**24** Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. **25** Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. **26** So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. **27** But I discipline my body and keep it under control,<sup>b</sup> lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

Verse 27 states, "I discipline my body." You can consider this as a reflexive because my body is me or myself. Paul is saying, "I discipline myself." No one is doing it from the outside, not your spouse, not anybody else.

You discipline your body  
You discipline yourself  
You keep it under control.  
You exercise that self-control.

We need spiritual help for this. This is critical here. Paul says, “Lest after preaching to others, I myself should be disqualified.” Could somebody be in ministry and teaching and preaching and the Word is valid and has benefit for the recipients who hear and believe and obey, but could the teacher preacher be dequeued, disqualified from rewards? Yes.

If we don’t do it with the right heart and according to the Word, we’re disqualifying ourselves from rewards. We obviously don’t want to do that. We don’t want to be disqualified. We want to not only do it, but we want to do it with the right heart and with the right motives and according to the Word.

Remember, in

**I Corinthians 13:10–13**

**1** If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. **2** And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. **3** If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned,<sup>a</sup> but have not love, I gain nothing.

I Corinthians 13 should become even more alive to us because it gives us what could disqualify us from receiving rewards!

Again, as I said, crowns represent achievement—accomplishments due to the work. It’s earned. It’s an acknowledgement by God, in this case, of what you’ve done according to the Word. We don’t want to be disqualified. We don’t want to spin our wheels, and we don’t want to waste our time. We don’t want to expend useless effort.

You think about the world today and so many, especially in retirement, so many people who occupy their time with things and activities rather than redeeming the time. Why waste your time on things which have no spiritual fruit? Instead, if we adhere to the Word and look forward to the hope, then we’re going to say, okay, I am going to exercise self-control in all things so that I do discipline myself and keep my body under control, and so that when I do function and perform in my ministry, I’m being rewarded for it.

And God wants to give us rewards. You think about what people pursue in this life, as I just mentioned, all the awards and athletes and celebrities and in business and politics. It’s all to get a prize. They’re all in pursuit of something.

We want to be in pursuit of God’s agenda and the heavenly prize. Thinking of pursuit again, as I said, I ran and I pursued winning age group awards, and I pursued certain times in races. When I was coaching, it was the pursuit of a championship for the team.

We are in pursuit of that which reaps eternal rewards. Consider I and II Timothy about what we are to pursue.



### **I Timothy 6:11**

**11** But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. **12** Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Ah, doesn't this hearken back to what we just read in I Corinthians 9 about boxing and not beating the air? Everything does connect.

But he says, oh, you man of God, flee these things, the things in the world that you can go after and pursue. Flee all those other things that are tangible, material, personal satisfaction, glory, etcetera.

This is great! Instead, pursue righteousness. (And it says, we're going to get the crown of righteousness 2 Timothy.) Pursue righteousness. Pursue godliness. Pursue faith.

How do you pursue faith? A lot of people say, well, faith is something you either have or you don't have. No, it says, you can have little faith. You can have great faith. And we are to pursue faith. In other Words, pursue increasing our faith and growing our faith. HOW?

### **Romans 10:17**

**17** So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

And faith comes by hearing the Word. So, we want our faith to grow. So, we have a lot of faith.

So how do we do that? We pursue it.

Pursue faith.

Pursue love.

Some would say, well, either you have love or you don't.

Either love a person or you don't, or you love something or you don't, or.... No, pursue love.

Pursue growth in love.

As Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, said, "Grow."

Increase in your love for one another.

All of these things grow contingent upon pursuit.

This is what we have to do.

And I talked earlier about knowing our roles—what God does, what we do.

Well, here's a command.

Pursue not the things of the world—glory, exaltation, accomplishment, achievement.

Pursue these intangibles of righteousness, of godliness, of faith, love, steadfastness.

You're going to need to be faithful.

You're going to need to persevere and gentleness.

Fight the good fight of faith.

**2 Timothy 2:22**

**22** So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart

You'll see so many of these crowns get into "heart," having the right heart before God. Which we spoke of earlier in this session.

We want to pursue—and a lot of these things are similar to those listed in I Timothy—righteousness, faith, love, peace. How can we pursue peace?

Some would say, well, I'm either peaceful or not. I either have peace or I don't. You can pursue peace. Makes me think of Hebrews where it says to strive to enter into his rest. That seems to be contradictory. They don't seem to fit. How do you strive to enter into his rest?

If we do our part of pursuing, making sure we're feeding on the Word, not allowing the Word to be choked by desires for other things, e.g., deceitfulness of riches, as in number three of the sower.

**2 Timothy 2:22**

**22** So flee youthful passions and **pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart**

That's critical, too, because who we hang out with is going to impact what we hear and what we see in terms of a Christlike life and Words which will edify, build up, strengthen, encourage.

So, there you have the first crown.

**24** Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. **25** Every athlete exercises **self-control** in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an **imperishable**. **26** So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. **27** But **I discipline my body and keep it under control,**<sup>b</sup> lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

The important points are that it's imperishable, incorruptible, not temporary. It is eternal. Essential to getting this recognition from God is exercising discipline and self-control in our lives and having the proper pursuit, not a trivial pursuit, not a temporary pursuit, but an eternal one.

God, thank you so much for the Word.

Thank you for you being clear in the Word about the rewards for us, by being faithful, by disciplining ourselves according to the Word.

We are so grateful for what Christ accomplished for us, for his example, for the examples of men like John and Paul and Peter and James, Philip and others in the New Testament, as recorded in the Book of Acts, we give you the glory and praise in Christ's name I pray.

Amen.