

The Five Crowns

There are five crowns (stephanos) discussed in the New Testament of the Bible. The crowns can more appropriately be called wreaths, or garlands, like the ones worn on the heads of athletic champions. The garlands (made of incorruptible metals and jewels) will be our prizes when it comes time for God to hand out awards to born again believers. They will be the awards for our walk and stand for God and His Word. They are not available to us now, but we will receive them after Christ's return.

THE INCORRUPTIBLE CROWN

I Corinthians 9: 25 -- And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

The first crown mentioned is the 'incorruptible' crown. This means it is a crown that will never be destroyed; it will never turn to dust. We will be immortal, and so will this crown. To fully understand the record we will begin at:

I Corinthians 9: 19 - 23 -- For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.

Paul is describing how he worked to win others to the Word of God. It is the type of Christian walk to which we can all aspire.

I Corinthians 9: 24 -- Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain [win].

Here, our walk is compared to an athletic endeavor like a footrace. The Lamsa translation of the Peshitta (Aramaic) text reads:

I Corinthians 9: 24 -- [Aramaic Translation] Do you not know that the runners in a race all run, but only one is victorious? So you must run that you may obtain victory.

We are urged to run with the intention of winning. This is not a Saturday morning Fun Run, but a race to win a crown.

I Corinthians 9: 25 -- [Aramaic Translation] And every man who battles in the contest frees his mind from every thing else. And yet they run to win a garland which is perishable; but we to win one which is everlasting.

A champion athlete is focused on the race at hand. They are not distracted by noises or activities going on around them. If they get distracted, they do not run well. Yet, all that an athlete wins is a perishable prize. It will not last forever. The prize for which we compete is everlasting.

I Corinthians 9: 26 -- I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

I Corinthians 9: 26 -- [Aramaic Translation] I therefore so run, not for something that is uncertain; and I so fight, not as one who beats the air;

Paul said that he ran for something that is certain. When he was in the boxing ring, he fought and made the blows count. He did not 'shadow box', or beat the air.

I Corinthians 9: 27 -- But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

I Corinthians 9: 27 -- [Aramaic Translation] But I conquer and subdue my body so that, by no chance, when I have preached to others, will I despise myself.

Paul kept his body in subjection to his mind (renewed mind), so that after he had called others to join in the competition (verses 19 - 23), there was no chance that he would fail in achieving the reward.

The Incorruptible Crown will be made available to the committed, focused Christians. Those who renew their mind, and practice discipline and self control like a committed athlete are the ones who will receive the award.

THE CROWN OF REJOICING

I Thessalonians 2: 19, 20 -- For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy.

The crown of rejoicing described here is one example of when we, as Christian believers, will be expected to loudly rejoice or exalt. When Christ comes back and we will all be together, we can let everyone else know about it. Our brothers and sisters in Christ will make up the crown of rejoicing.

Philippians 3: 20, 21 -- For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

We look forward to the return of Jesus Christ. When he does return, our earthly, mortal bodies will be changed to be like his -- immortal and glorious.

Philippians 4: 1 -- Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.

Twice Paul referred to the believers as 'dearly beloved', so we know how he loved his brothers and

sisters in Christ. Also, they are his 'joy and crown'. Every day we must be thankful for all the believers in the world. On the day of Christ's return, we will all get together and wear the crown of rejoicing.

THE CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

II Timothy 4: 7, 8 -- I have fought a good fight [ran a great race], I have finished my course, I have kept the faith [thy believing]: 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.

II Timothy 4: 7, 8 -- [Aramaic Translation] I have fought a good fight, I have finished my race, I have kept my faith: Henceforth there is preserved for me a crown of righteousness, which my Lord, the righteous judge, will give me at that day; and not to me only but also to all those who have loved his appearing.

The crown of righteousness makes an athletic reference like the 'incorruptible crown'. Paul says he has fought a good fight -- he didn't give up, lie down, or quit. He finished the race -- he kept believing. Because of this, a crown of righteousness has been reserved for him, and for others who look forward to the appearing of Jesus Christ. 'Righteousness' means that something is just and right. How many times have we read a news story, or seen something on television that made us say, "It just isn't right"? That won't happen even one time once Christ returns. Paul wrote this to the church in order to exhort them (us) to stand for God in light of the hope of the return of Jesus Christ. If we look forward to our crown of righteousness, we can stand firm and sure right now.

THE CROWN OF LIFE

James 1: 12 -- Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

Happy is the person that endures (remains behind after others have left) trials, tribulations and temptations. For when he is proved, he will receive (manifest) the crown of life (life in all its fullness, complete).

The church of God, of which we are a part, is exhorted to be steadfast in the face of trials and tribulations. When we overcome them, we will receive the crown of life.

THE CROWN OF GLORY

I Peter 5: 1 - 4 -- The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also 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 thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre [dishonorable gain]; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

Peter writes these lines to the elders of the church, so we see the crown of glory will be available to leaders in the Word. They are supposed to feed the 'flock' the undiluted and perfect Word of God, not for money or any personal gain, but willingly and out of love. They are not 'overlords' of the

other believers, but should lead by example. If they do this, Peter says, when Christ (the chief Shepherd) returns, they will receive a crown of glory that never fades away. It is everlasting, and the color and brilliance will abide forever.

The five crowns will be part of our reward we receive after the return of Christ. The Word of God tells us some things about the crowns, but not everything. A big part of the reward will be the surprise of finding out everything about our new life, and the privileges and responsibilities that go with it. For now, we can do the best we can for God, and look forward to the Hope, the return of Jesus Christ.