

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## A Godly Crown

*And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. (1 Peter 5:4, KJV 1900)*

At times we all tend to generalize too many Scriptures. We superficially chase a word or phrase and think that every appearance of the word means exactly the same, regardless of where it appears or how the inspired Bible author uses it. Salvation and various words that are used in reference to the Second Coming are common examples of this practice. If a particular word means exactly the same thing every time it appears in Scripture, we could program a computer to interpret the Bible for us. This artificial reliance on individual words leads to bad interpretations and bad beliefs. Any respected dictionary gives multiple definitions of a given word. Responsible reading of the passage requires that we wisely—rightly—choose the definition that applies to the word in a given passage, and that we follow that meaning to an interpretation that harmonizes with other Scriptures related to this word or topic.

The context of our study verse addresses "elders" and specifically directs them in their work. If we interpret our study verse to refer to the Second Coming, we at the least imply the idea of salvation by works or of variable rewards in heaven that are measured based on how well we served in this life. The idea of variable rewards in heaven based on our faithfulness—or lack thereof—in this life always dilutes and overshadows the Biblical truth of Jesus' work for our sins and for our entrance into eternal glory with Him. "Will there be any stars in my crown?" ignores the crown that He wears, and it contradicts New Testament Scripture regarding our crowns in heaven.

*The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. (Revelation 4:10-11 KJVP)*

Far from the self-centered notion of parading around heaven with our crowns, this testimony from Scripture tells us that those who are there "...cast their crowns before the throne," hardly the image of parading with them.

The Geneva Bible contains an instructive footnote to this verse, though it refers to this crown as in heaven after we die.

That the shepherds' minds are not overcome either with the wickedness of men, or their cruelty, he warns them to continually look at the chief shepherd, and the crown which is laid up for them in heaven.

Those who minister the gospel live in a broken world. They, like the sheep whom they serve, are also weak vessels, and broken. When they preach the sweet deliverance of a loving, merciful Savior, the conviction of their preaching is measured by their own sense of their personal deliverance. The Geneva footnote reminds us. The most devoted of under-shepherds may turn his eyes toward the wickedness or cruelty of men around them and lose their bearings toward the chief Shepherd.

*And when the chief Shepherd shall appear....*  
The idea of the chief Shepherd appearing leads many Bible students to conclude that Peter was referring to eternal heaven. The idea that every "appearance" of the Lord mentioned in Scripture after the Lord's Incarnate coming and return deals with eternity in heaven creates an unhealthy basis for a deist-like attitude toward God in the present world. The deist belief holds that God created the material universe, but, once created and activated, He disappeared and shall only return in active involvement at the Second Coming. What a lonely present existence for people who believe this error. Scripture bears witness that the Lord remains presently, actively involved in the lives of His children in the present. For Biblical information on this truth, study the Gospel of John, chapters 14-16. How many times does Jesus remind the disciples that the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, would come to them after He ascended to convict, to instruct, to teach, and otherwise minister to them? Every such appearance of the Holy Spirit to minister to our present needs contradicts the deist concept. It should be quite clear to us that every time Scripture mentions the Lord's appearance does not refer to the Second Coming.

No doubt the chief Shepherd shall appear at the Second Coming, but He will then appear as the Judge. His appearance as "...chief Shepherd" points us to His present care and presence in our

lives. Like the “Good Shepherd” of John 10 or “...my shepherd” of Psalm 23, the “...chief Shepherd” often appears to teach, to convict, to comfort, and to bless His faithful children. The crown of glory to a faithful “elder” in the context of our study flows far more harmoniously with this temporal interpretation than with an eternal appearance and crown.

The implication of the chief Shepherd’s appearing in this passage suggests that in some way He has assigned stewardship duties to “Under-shepherds.” Like the returning lord in the parable who calls on his servants to account for their conduct while He was gone, the Lord calls His ministers to account for their stewardship at various times throughout their lives. When He appears in this temporal way, the faithful under-shepherds shall receive the crown of honor from their Lord. Likewise, the unfaithful shall face the shame of no crown from their Lord.

In almost sixty years of ministry, I have often observed ministers in their final years. Some of them develop a bitter, almost angry attitude and close their ministry complaining about all the ways that the sheep in their care abused and disrespected them. They died a lonely death. Other ministers seem to grow increasingly loving and mellow in their last years. They are the men who give you a peaceful comfort that the Lord is good and that He remains actively involved with His children. I suggest that the first class of ministers reap what they sowed during their active years, and that the second class of ministers manifest the “crown” that the chief Shepherd gave them for their godly tending of His sheep.

At times, a minister of the gospel who shows great promise may stumble over a besetting sin and bring his ministry to a disappointing end. The author of the old hymn, “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing,” Robert Robinson, entered the ministry at an early age and was richly blessed for a season until he slipped into just such a fall. That man who was so promising at an early age had disgraced his life and ministry by his mid-thirties. Years later Robinson was riding a horse-drawn coach in the English countryside. Sitting beside him was a well-dressed woman who was busy reading. Suddenly she looked up from her reading and commented about the powerful words of a poem she had just read. When she started quoting the lines, Robinson recognized the words as his own in the poem. Given his disappointing experience, his own words took on a forceful sense of prophecy.

***Prone to wander***, Lord, I feel it,  
***Prone to leave the God I love***;  
Here’s my heart, O take and seal it,  
Seal it for Thy courts above.

In quiet grief, Robinson is said to have commented to the woman that he longed to feel the sentiment toward God that he felt when writing those words.

Robert Robinson did not receive his crown of glory at the Lord’s appearance that day.

*...ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.* What is this crown? Whatever the honor in human accomplishment, it is not permanent. Often the businessman of honor is tomorrow’s man of shame. Even when that honor is not later tarnished by failure, new and better products or services cause the honor to fade quickly. The crown that the Lord bestows on His children for their faithful service—in this case, faithful ministry—doesn’t fade based on passing fads. Generations later a godly minister’s writings or labors continue to produce fruitful honor to the Lord in the lives of those who were touched during the man’s lifetime. Enduring as this crown is, however, when we get to heaven, we’ll have no need of it, so we shall join other saints who cast their crowns at the feet of Him who alone holds worth in that world of glory to God.

*Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.* (Revelation 3:11 KJVP)

No man can take away your eternal life, but seducing men can and do take away the crowns of believers by distracting them from their Lord into the vices of sin and pride. Repeatedly in the brief letters to the “angel” of each of the seven churches, the Lord reveals that He holds these men in His hand. If a man turns from his Lord and compromises his ministry, the Lord warns that He shall take that man out of His hands, take away his ministry, and give it to another, a faithful man who shall serve Him and His sheep, not their personal desires and interests.

On a few occasions over the years, I have seen a church appoint their aged pastor as their “Pastor Emeritus,” while calling a younger man to fill the Biblical role. No Scripture supports such a move. Peter’s point reminds us that the Lord is the “Crown” of faithful pastors.

*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.* (1 Corinthians 9:27 KJV)

Paul acknowledges that he must constantly restrain his body to avoid shipwreck of faith. Failure to control pride, ego, or other fleshly attitudes has turned many a profitable pastor away from faithful service and onto the wrecked heap of castaway gifts, men such as Robert Robinson, mentioned above. “Be thou faithful....” (Revelation 2:10)

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Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor