

The Doctrine of the Crown/Wreath

I. Introduction

A) The crown/wreath is a special category of SG³ given only to those believers who continue to apply BD in their lives until their promotion into Ph₃, either at death or the Rapture. Rev 2:10c *“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”* cp 2Tim 4:8

- 1) just as with the blessing of SG³, not all believers will receive the crown – Rev 3:11 *“I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown.”* cp 1Jn 2:28
- 2) there are two categories of crown/wreath given to believers, based on their individual Ph₂ niche:
 - a) righteousness/life – 2Tim 4:8; Js 1:12
 - b) boasting/glory – 1Th 2:19; 1Pet 5:4
- 3) the crown/wreath is also described as “imperishable” (1Cor 9:25) and “unfading” (1Pet 5:4), indicating that for all eternity, it will never lose its luster, brilliance, glory, or magnificence

B) The background:

- 1) wreaths were woven of different vegetation for different honors, including oak leaves (athletic events), roses and violets (love), ivy (civil service), or grass (military); a gold wreath in the shape of oak leaves was given to the Caesars.
- 2) the ancient athletic games, such as the Isthmus games held near Corinth, as well as Olympus, Delphi, and Nemea, used wreaths as the token of an award (similar to our gold medals today)
- 3) Roman society gave wreaths based on position, honor, or heroism
- 4) a wreath was worn by the bride and bridegroom at a wedding
- 5) the wreath itself was only an overt token of the status and reward for such things as athletic success, military heroism, festal gladness, or governmental position
- 6) for this reason the crown is also called “the prize” – cp 1Cor 9:24-27
- 7) Note: the only individual in the Olympic games given more honor than the recipient of the wreath was the one who bestowed it; by application, the wreath received by the adjusted believer glorifies the Sovereign King of the Universe, since it is awarded based on His standards.

C) Vocabulary:

- 1) **στέφανος** – *stephanos*; “wreath”, translated “crown” in most English versions, is a direct reference to the overt symbol of honor and esteem given an individual, based on exceptional achievement in a given area. cp Js 1:12 *“Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”*
- 2) **στεφανῶω** – *stephanoō* (vb) “to be crowned/awarded the wreath”, indicating the ceremony and award of the overt symbol of victory. cp Heb 2:7 *“You have made Him for a little while lower than the angels; You have crowned Him with glory and honor, and have appointed Him over the works of Your hands”*
- 3) **διάδημα** – *diadēma*; “crown”, not used of the believer’s wreath, but of a kingly crown worn by a ruler. cp Rev 13:1, 19:12 (ISAGOGICALLY, THIS CROWN WAS ACTUALLY A CLOTH BAND OR RIBBON, ATTACHED TO A TURBAN OR TIARA, SIGNIFYING ROYALTY – SEVERAL MIGHT BE WORN BY ONE INDIVIDUAL.)
- 4) **βραβείον** – *brabeion*; “prize”, used of the prize (the symbol for which was the wreath) given to an athletic victor. cp Phi 3:14 *“I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*

II. Usages of the Word “Wreath” (στέφανος – *stephanos*) 25x

- A) The “Crown of Thorns” placed on Jesus at His trials – Mt 27:29; Mk 15:17; Jn 19:2, 5
- B) The name of the first Christian martyr – Ac 6:5, 8, 9, 7:59, 8:2, 11:19, 22:20
- C) The symbol of victory in an athletic contest – 1Cor 9:25
- D) Individual congregations, in relation to their communicator – Phi 4:1; 1Th 2:19
- E) The symbol for a completed Christian life – 2Tim 4:8; Js 1:12; Rev 2:10, 3:11
- F) The symbol for a Pastor-Teacher’s completed niche – 1Pet 5:4
- G) “Golden Crowns” worn by the 24 elders and the Lord Jesus Christ – Rev 4:4, 10, 14:14
- H) The symbol of authority given to the rider on the white horse of the first Seal Judgement (false peace campaign) – Rev 6:4
- I) The symbol of power on the heads of the demons from Tartarus – Rev 9:7
- J) Twelve stars around the head of the “great sign in heaven” – Rev 12:1

III. The Purpose of the Crown

- A) The crown/wreath is an overt symbol of God’s grace in the life of the believer, and as such glorifies Him as Holy and Righteous. cp Rev 4:9-11
- B) It is a reward for a life lived in compliance with God’s Will. Js 1:12
- C) It signifies the victory of the believer in Ph₂, and is grounds for legitimate, sanctified boasting in God.
- D) As an eternal sign vindicating the believer for the sacrifices and applications made in Ph₂, since our hope is fixed on Him and His kingdom. 1Cor 9:25 cp Heb 12:1-2
- E) Because believers receive the wreath strictly by the Grace of God, it glorifies Him as a just and righteous God, One who protects, provides for, and rewards those who seek Him (in contradiction to the charges of negative volition).
- F) Thus the continued emphasis on achieving this distinctive reward, to glorify God for His vindication of the adjusted believer, who was obedient to His Will and Plan.

IV. Some Associated Blessings Include:

- A) Continued blessings of the highest kind – Rev 2:7
- B) Doctrinal insight and an intimate relationship with God – Rev 2:17, 28 cp 22:16
- C) Authority over the nations – Rev 2:26
- D) Divine approbation and honor – Rev 3:5
- E) An exalted place in the worship of God – Rev 3:12
- F) A higher position in God’s Kingdom – Rev 3:21

V. The Individual Wreaths

- A) Righteousness/Life – available for all believers, based on their faithfulness to God’s Plan and Will, in addition to whatever SG³ has been produced. Rev 2:10
 - 1) It is awarded based on completing one’s assigned niche in life, not time in Ph₂ or relative spiritual maturity. Mt 20:1-15 (esp vs 12, which makes it specific that the “general” blessings of SG³ are not in view)
 - 2) Confident anticipation of the award ceremony is one sure sign of receipt of the crown, since it indicates a clean conscience and steadfast application. 2Tim 4:8 “*in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.*”
 - 3) Perfection/maturity is not required, but an overall demonstration of love for God (manifested by a high level of application) throughout one’s life. Js 1:12
 - 4) Based on the designation “Wreath of Life” it is given to those who die a martyr’s death. Rev 2:10

B) Boasting/Glory – available to communicators of Bible Doctrine; the Apostles and Pastor-Teachers.

- 1) The Apostles acted as Pastors for multiple churches, their congregations were proof that they were fulfilling God's Will for their lives. 1Cor 9:17; Phi 4:1; 1Th 2:19
- 2) "Elders" are distinguished from "Apostles". Ac 15: 2, 4, 6, 22, 23
- 3) The designation "elders" is a reference to Pastors. 1Pet 5:1 cp Tit 1:5
- 4) The twenty-four elders of Rev 4:4, 10 are resurrected Pastors who have received this Wreath of Glory, based on their own completed niche in Ph₂.
 - a) they have received their rewards, and must therefore be Church Age believers (clothed in white = righteous deeds of the saints – Rev 19:8)
 - b) they sit on thrones around the throne of Jesus Christ, in fulfillment of Mat 20:23
 - c) realizing that they have not achieved this distinction of their own merit, they willingly cast their crowns to the only One worthy of honor, the Lord Jesus Christ. Rev 4:10-11

VI. Other Examples of Believers Who Will Receive the Crown

A) Hebrews Chapter 11 (the Spiritual Hall of Fame)

- 1) Abel – offered his sacrifice by faith – vs 4
- 2) Enoch – walked with God – vs 5
- 3) Noah – prepared the ark out of reverence/devotion to God – vs 7
- 4) Abraham – obedience based on faith – vs 8, 17,
- 5) Isaac and Jacob – obedience based on faith – vs 9, 20-21
- 6) Sarah – trusted God to supply for her needs – vs 11
- 7) Joseph – believed the promise of the Exodus and applied accordingly – vs 22
- 8) Moses – rejected the rulership of the most powerful empire on earth, choosing rather "the reproach of Christ" – vs 26
- 9) Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, the prophets, men of whom the world was not worthy – those seeking a better resurrection – vss 32-40 (NOTE THAT THESE EXAMPLES ARE SUMMED UP BY THIS PHRASE)
- 10) Most notably, the Lord Jesus Christ – endured the shame and agony of the cross "for the joy set before Him" – 12:1-2

VII. Because this tremendous honor and privilege has been offered to us, and because we are to seek "the things that are above" (Col 3:1), receipt of the crown should be the foremost goal of the believer's life, since it is overt testimony as to the infinite Grace of God in our lives. cp Lk 17:10 *"So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.'"*

Js 1:12 "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."

Rev 3:11 "I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown."

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July, 2002