

Faithful in a Few Things

“Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful over a few things; I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your master!” Matthew 25:23

Eternally Secure, but Accountable

All Christians will be called upon, at the Lord’s coming, to give an accounting of themselves; of things done in the body (2 Cor. 5:10; Matt. 16:27; Rev. 22:12). This is not a specific accounting of sins in our life, as Christ has paid the complete and full penalty for sin. We are assured that he has paid the full price and sin will never be charged to our account again. In fact, He says in Psalm 103:12 that they are removed “as far as the east is from the west”! He has put His very life into us and thereby made us children of God. We are a new creation and this gift of eternal salvation is based upon His righteousness! He will not go back on His word and His work to then condemn us. Christ took all condemnation! He also will not cause us to somehow be “unborn.” Therefore, we are secure eternally as His children.

Some Christians may take this to mean that they now have their “ticket to heaven” and can live any way they want to. In one respect this is true. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:23 that as God’s children, “all things are lawful.” That is, Christians have complete freedom to choose what they want in their life. However, in this same sentence he finishes by saying, “but not all things are profitable.” The child of God has the freedom to choose whatever he or she wants (as do all human beings due to their God-given free will), but Paul points out that the Christian’s choices may or may not be profitable or pleasing to the Lord. (The reality is we have been purchased with the blood of Christ and we are actually NOT our own.)

Again, this has nothing to do with condemnation for sin, as that has been removed in Christ’s free gift of grace to us. However, sin can still have a negative impact on the believer, even though God’s penalty for it has been removed. We cannot “play” with sin in our lives and think that there are no consequences whatsoever. God may actually forget our sins (Heb. 8:12), but sin in our lives can still damage our walk with the Lord. Sin can deceive us, dull our conscience and senses, break fellowship with God (from our side), damage human relations, cause physical issues, and many other negative things! So in this respect, these kinds of choices are certainly not profitable.

The New Testament reveals there will be major, future judgments by God. Two of these are the Great White Throne, found in Revelation 20:11-15, and the Bema of Christ (often rendered “judgment seat”) found in 2 Corinthians 5:10 and Romans 14:10. The Bema is the first to occur of these two judgments, and Christians are the focus of examination there. Then, some time afterwards, there is the Great White Throne, which is the last judgment by God. The result of this final judgment is, “Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:15). Our focus now, as believers in Christ, should only be the Bema judgment. Romans 14:12-13 says, “So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God. Therefore, let us stop passing judgment on one another.” (“Bema” is a word the ancient Greeks used for a physically elevated position

where awards were given to competing athletes at the Olympic Games. Paul is clearly likening the Christian life to the athletic discipline of these games and the resultant awards for competing well. See 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.)

At the Bema of Christ, we are told there will be an accounting of things believers have done, to see if their actions were profitable or not (2 Cor. 5:10). First Corinthians chapter three tells us the things we build with - our works - will be "tested by fire" to see how they will hold up under divine examination. If the materials we are building with survive the testing fire (gold, silver, precious stone) then there will be profit and meaning for our lives. If our building works are burned (wood, hay, stubble) then we will suffer loss and there won't be profit. Paul goes on to say in this chapter that even if all our works are burned up, the person will still be saved "yet as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:15). This is no loss of eternal salvation for the believer, but no profit either. Instead, it is a loss of reward. Several other places in scripture indicate that for those who are faithful and their works remain in that day, there will be rewards given to them by the Lord (see Psa. 62:12; Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 4:5; 1 Pet. 1:17; James 1:12; 2 John 8; Rev. 22:12).

What are the works that are profitable to a Christian? First of all, Christ tells us in John 15:5 that if we abide in Him we "will bear much fruit," and "apart from Me you can do nothing." Therefore, we shouldn't think that running out to do our own version of "serving God" and "saving the world for Jesus" is pleasing in His sight. He said many will come to Him in that day saying, "Lord, Lord, did we not do [*many things*] in your name?" And I will say, 'Depart from Me you workers of iniquity – I never knew you.'" (Matt. 7:21-23) How can He say that He never knew them? Doesn't God know all things? It is because they didn't have an intimate relationship with Him and didn't abide in Him. Therefore, the things they did amounted to nothing. The Lord Himself didn't have a direct one-on-one relationship with them, and therefore He never personally told them to do those things! They did their works apart from His direct leading, which comes from the leading of His Spirit (Gal. 5:18). "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14). It may seem good to us to do many things in His name, but if we don't hear it from Him and He's not leading us to do it, then there is no profit in it. "My sheep hear My voice," Jesus told His disciples (John 10:27). These unprofitable actions will actually rob us of any potential reward (i.e., our works amounting to wood, hay, and stubble will be burned up).

Others believe they must do many big and grand things in order to be pleasing to God at the Bema, so as to not suffer loss there. But thinking we have to do many significant works can cause us to fall into a performance trap where we almost never seem to measure up. This usually results in self condemnation and unhealthy fear. Our Father's loving desire for His children is that we would experience no condemnation (there is none for believers – Romans 8:1) and that we would be perfected in love. First John 4:18 tells us, "*There is no fear in love; perfect love drives out all fear. So then, love has not been made perfect in anyone who is afraid, because fear has to do with punishment.*" Yes, God is the most Awesome Being in the universe who is worthy to be feared, since He exerts ultimate control and judgment over all. But our proper perspective is one of knowing Him as a loving Father who strongly desires the very best for all of His children. The Lord in Luke 12:32 tells us, "It

is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." **However, when necessary, our loving Father will discipline us for our ultimate good** (see Heb. 12:6).

A Few Things – Well Done

Let's look now at Matthew 25:14-30 where the faithful and unfaithful servants are presented. This parable gives us good insight into what is profitable in the sight of God and what is pleasing to Him. The three servants all receive money from their master before he leaves on a journey. Two of the servants are faithful and increase the money entrusted to them while one is not faithful. The faithful ones receive praise and reward when their master returns, but the unfaithful one receives neither.

The unfaithful one feared his master and therefore hid his master's money and did nothing profitable. This servant didn't know his master well and had an erroneous view of him as a "hard man" and accuses his master of almost magically "reaping where you haven't sown." His attitude and approach were in error and therefore there was no profit to be returned to his master. He receives a rebuke for his error in judgment and his master tells him "You should have deposited my money with the bankers so there would at least have been interest paid on it" (v. 27). (Personally, I believe the "bankers" are those who also possessed money, therefore they equate to other believers. Accordingly, this most likely means to invest our heavenly "deposit" in those of God's household we're surrounded with. For instance, as Jesus says in Matthew 24:45-46, "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of his household, to give the others their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whose master returns and finds him doing his job.")

The master called this unfaithful servant "wicked and lazy." He went on to decree, "Therefore take the money from him . . . and throw that unprofitable servant into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." I think this parable clearly shows that the attitudes, fear and works of this unfaithful servant were not pleasing to God, and he did not have an intimate relationship with Him! Regardless of exactly what is meant by "outer darkness" or "weeping and gnashing of teeth," I think everyone would agree that we don't want to be in that servant's situation and to hear those words!

Now look at what he told his faithful servants. These two wisely invested the money entrusted to them and each was able to present their master with double in return. This greatly pleased the master and he told each of them, "Well done good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in a few things; I will put you over many things. Enter into the joy of your master!" This situation of the three servants is clearly an illustration of the Bema, where a recompense of rewards occurs in an atmosphere of righteousness. But there is also the real possibility of not attaining to a reward, and thereby a loss is experienced along with a rebuke for being unprofitable. (Remember, all three servants were in the master's household and were all given money by the master. The master returned to speak with all three of his servants, to receive an accounting of what they had done with what he had given them. Therefore, they all belonged to the master. Thus, they were all believers.)

God Starts Small and Humble

So if the Lord gives rewards based upon us being faithful in a few things, let's examine whether this basic principle arises in other places in scripture. **The question is: Does He demand a high level of significant works from every one of us; or rather is He pleased if we only follow through on the relatively few things He gives us to be faithful in?**

The principle of God starting things in a small way often occurs in scripture as well as in nature. All living things start out small and grow larger. This is a principle of life. This can be seen with plants (seeds) and animals (eggs, embryos and cells multiplying). In the gospels Christ likens the divine life planted in us to a seed. We're told in Matthew 17:20 that if we have "faith the size of a mustard seed" (a very small seed indeed) we can move mountains. Life always starts out small and then grows. God plants small seeds so they can grow. He creates something out of nothing. He starts small. This is His way.

This smallness is illustrated in the scriptures many times. God came to Elijah in 1 Kings 19:12 as "a still, small voice." A small stone killed Goliath. Jesus praised the church in Philadelphia telling them, "You have a little strength." Likewise, He told Paul, "My strength is perfected in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). God was pleased with the widow's mite as an offering and not satisfied with the much larger one offered by the other worshipper (Mark 12:42). His beginnings with the nation of Israel started small with His relationship with one man, Abram (later named Abraham).

Likewise, Jesus condensed all the law and the prophets down into two things we need to concern ourselves with. In Matthew 22:36-40 Jesus was asked which commandment is the greatest. He answered that it was to love God supremely and that the second greatest commandment was to love your neighbor as yourself. He then said, "All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." So instead of giving us a big list of things to be faithful in, He gave us only two. He also told Martha in Luke 10:41-42, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but *only* one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part...." This one thing was choosing Christ Himself, enjoying His close presence and listening intently to His word (v. 39). God typically does not give us a big list of things to do, but rather we see time and again that He focuses us on a small number of things we are to pay close attention to.

And how did God choose to manifest Himself in the flesh? He did it as a small human baby! There is not much in human life that's as small, weak and helpless as an infant, yet that's how He decided to launch the New Covenant. He was the one grain of wheat that fell into the ground to die, so that many grains would be brought forth (John 12:24). This was truly a small beginning! And He started His ministry with a small handful of men, just twelve disciples. And His work with all the gentile nations was spearheaded primarily with just one man, Paul (akin to *Paulus*, which means small). A few faithful men, with the seed of Christ growing in them, overturned the whole world! So we see that God starts small and humble with quality first, and then comes growth.

Snapshots of Faith

Hebrews 11 is known as “the faith chapter.” It is full of instances of a little faith being demonstrated. That is, it is often just a small amount of faith shown by someone, which in turn gives God the means to do something in a big way. We often think the faithful ones presented in this chapter were giants of faith, but that’s not really the case at all, as they were men just like us. For instance, Abraham is often called the “Father of Faith.” But the Bible records that he lied and tried to give his wife Sarah away not once, but twice! He also had a child with Hagar, after God promised a son through Sarah. And David murdered Uriah and then stole his wife! Sampson made many mistakes and errors in judgment in his life, but finished well with one final act of faith. Over and over in this chapter we see ones who were not always so faithful, yet instances of their demonstrated faith are recorded by the Holy Spirit.

I’ve heard it said that Hebrews 11 is similar to a loving father taking snapshots of His children as they do something which makes him proud. It’s like a proud dad showing off a picture of his daughter and saying, “And that’s little Janie doing her very first summersault!” God takes note of these instances where people put their simple trust and faith in Him. It’s as if the Holy Spirit only saw these few instances of faith at work in these people’s lives, and these were the important things to convey and NOT their failures and shortcomings. Sure, the shortcomings were certainly there, but recorded here are the “few things” these ones were faithful in. These are specific instances of faith through which God was then able to work and use for His own glory. It is these *faith instances* that really matter to Him.

With these things in mind, it shows us why the Lord would be pleased by His children being faithful in even a few things. This should be a very encouraging word to us! God knows us and knows few of us are spiritual Super-Saints (five-talented servants). Our loving and wise Father doesn’t place a heavy burden of crushing responsibility on our backs. Christ said, “Take My yoke upon you, for My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” Was He just speaking something in a flowery way to somehow motivate us even though it wasn’t true? A thousand NO’s! If He said it, then pleasing Him is in reality easy and light. This is such encouragement – He assures us we can make it and hear those blessed words from Him, “*Well done good and faithful servant! You have been faithful in a few things . . . enter into the joy of your Lord!*” Knowing He will reward and praise us for being faithful in a few things (and also that we can suffer grief by not pleasing Him), should be great motivation for us!

What are the Few Things?

What are the few things we should be faithful in? That depends on the individual. What you are to be faithful in may differ from what I am to be faithful in. We all must learn from Him what these things are, so that we may be well-pleasing to Him. In order for us to truly know these things, we must have a close walk with Him. We must diligently seek Him. Are there things that you know for certain He’s clearly told you to do? If you don’t know what these things are for your own life, then you should ask Him to reveal them to you. In addition, you can ask Him for the strength and endurance to keep you faithful in those things. His grace can strengthen and empower you to do whatever He requires of you (see 1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Tim. 2:1).

We have all been given certain things by Him, including time, energy, skills and to varying degrees money. We shouldn't assume to think we know how He wants us to use these things. Therefore, we must all go to Him and ask how He wants us to use these for His glory, for the building-up of His body, and for ushering in the kingdom.

He has communicated to me certain things He wants me to be faithful in on an ongoing basis, and the Anointing has reinforced these in my life many times. They aren't what I personally consider really big things. One thing He has impressed me with, over and over, is for me to just stay and be content with where He has put me. (This is important as I've had a history of "jumping ship" throughout much of my life.) That means to stay with my wife; stay with the Christians He's put me with; stay with others He's surrounded me with, stay with my job, house, etc. Unless He clearly directs otherwise, this is His leading for me.

A second thing is to seek Him faithfully each morning when I arise - by talking to Him, taking everything to Him in prayer, getting into His word, declaring His word, and singing. A third thing is getting with other believers several times a week to enjoy Christ with one another. As Hebrews 10:25 says, "Don't forsake the assembling of yourselves together, as is the practice of some, and so much the more as you see the day drawing near." I know this also means to make myself available for saints who are in need of my assistance, fellowship and encouragement (Rom. 12:3-8). A fourth thing He's impressed on me is simply to keep turning to Him throughout my day, in a simple way as I remember Him - calling His name and talking to Him about anything and everything. *Bottom-line: It's really all about just having an ongoing relationship of love with Him and with fellow believers - whom He dwells in!* (1 John 4:21).

These are my "few things" I know He's told me to be consistently faithful in. I know that if I wasn't at least reasonably faithful in these things that I would have zero excuse in that day before Him at the Bema. He has confirmed these to me repeatedly through His indwelling anointing, through His word, and through fellowship. If nothing else happens in my life, I need to make sure I apply some diligence to see that at least these few things are happening regularly.

Being faithful in the few things He gives us is the way to please Him and our way into glory!

"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

Philippians 3:14

"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out all fear, because fear means punishment. The one not fearing has been perfected in love."

1 John 4:18

Tery Tennant 10/1/18
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tery@juno.com