

Unprofitable Servants

"So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." (Luke 17:10).

In making the statement noted above, Jesus was not minimizing the value of the service His disciples give Him. To the contrary, we find Jesus commending faith (Matthew 8:11) and service (Mark 14:3-9). In His discussion of the events on the day of judgment we find Jesus saying, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" and "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matthew 25:21,23,34).

What Jesus taught in the context of His statement recorded in Luke 17:10 was that none of us is ever going to give more to God than He deserves or than He expects. When we come to the end of life's journey, not a single one of us is going to be able to say that we outdid ourselves when it came to being obedient to the Lord. Inherent in this statement is the need for humility on the part of each of us as servants of God.

One chapter later in Luke 18 the inspired physician recorded a parable that clearly illustrates Jesus' words. He penned the Lord's parable about two men who went up to the temple to pray. The first, a Pharisee, essentially told God how great he was and how valuable he was to the Lord. He wasn't like anyone else. He wasn't an extortionist, an unjust man, an adulterer, or even like the lowly publican nearby. He fasted and gave tithes above all that could be expected (or so he thought). This Pharisee was proud of his "spiritual" accomplishments and figured that God must surely sit back and use him as the benchmark by which to measure all of His servants. In his mind, this Pharisee was all God wanted and more. The second man in the parable, a publican, "standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner." (Luke 18:13). Jesus concluded His parable by saying, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." (Luke 18:14).

In this parable, one man felt he had gone above and beyond the call of duty to God while the other felt that he could never do enough to show his gratitude to the Lord for what He had done for him. One said to God, "I am great!" The other said to God, "YOU are great." One boasted of his value to God. One begged for mercy from God. One said, "I'm stupendous and You need ME, Lord." The other said, "I'm a sinner and I need YOU, Lord." One was obviously a servant of self, while the other was unquestionably a servant of God.

"We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." On a daily basis we do absolutely nothing more than God expects of us. Whether we lift the fallen, tend to the sick, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, house the homeless, preach the Gospel, study the Bible, pray to the Father, assemble with the saints for worship, attend Bible classes, encourage the downtrodden or engage in any other acts of service or worship, we are doing no more than God expects of us.

Knowing that God expects faithful service of us, perhaps it would be wise for us to consider not just what God expects of us in His service, but what we expect of ourselves in His service. We know that we'll never do more than He expects, but what expectations have we set for ourselves? Do we expect to grow in the faith? Do we expect to push ourselves to do more for God in His kingdom? Do we expect to try harder to grow into more mature, more firmly grounded Christians? Let's take stock of our service to God, seeking not to see how little we can do and still get by but instead, seeking to grow and improve in our service day by day. We will never do more than God expects of us, but why should any of us be satisfied with doing or being LESS than God expects of us?

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