

Pursue Excellence

Philippians 1:9-11; Matthew 25:21

Introduction:

The pursuit of excellence is not just a business slogan or a sports adage, rather it is a call that every Christian must take seriously.

Christ and His church deserve our absolute best in every aspect.

Should Christ accept less than our best efforts as members of His body?

When we needed a Savior, God sent His absolute best (John 3:16).

When Christ gave Himself up for us, He gave His absolute best (Ephesians 5:2).

Consider two passages that show us the importance of pursuing excellence in our Christian walk.

One is Philippians 1:9-11.

There the apostle Paul wrote, “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

What does Paul mean by “approve the things that are excellent”?

“Approve” means to examine or test and regard as worthwhile or judge as good.

“Excellent” is a term that means “be more valuable than, be worth more than, be superior.”¹

Paul prayed that Christians might grow in their love and discern between good and evil, so they could regard as worthwhile the things that are more valuable thereby choosing the best behavior and best thing to do.

To offer our best to God, we need to use “real knowledge and discernment, so that [we] may approve the things that are excellent.”

What excellent things is God looking for that He will reward and praise?

The answer is found in what He will say in the other passage we should consider, Matthew 25:21.

Jesus said to the five-talent man and the two-talent man, “Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.”

One of these days, Jesus is going to reward excellent service given by those “filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

If we are faithful to pursue excellence, then our best will be given to God, and He will reward us.

To offer God our absolute best we need to keep a few things Jesus will say in mind.

I. Jesus will say, “Well done.”

He will not say, “Well said, Well thought, Well supervised, Well-directed, or Well criticized.”

¹ James Swanson, [*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek \(New Testament\)*](#) (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

He will say, "Well done."

James 1:25 explains, "one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does."

A person who wants to receive praise from God must find something to do.

If you need help finding something to do, we can help you.

2 Corinthians 8:12 says, "For if the readiness (eagerness or willingness) is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have."

The main thing about serving is having a desire to do something for God.

Do you want to do something for God?

All works are important, so get busy doing something.

"Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve," says Colossians 3:23 and 24.

II. Jesus will say, "Well done."

"Well done" indicates that whatever we do, we should do well.

Solomon commanded, "whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might..." (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

Jeremiah wrote, "Cursed be the one who does the LORD's work negligently (a hit-or-miss fashion)..." (Jeremiah 48:10).

When God finished His work, "It was very good" (Genesis 1:31) and Jesus did "all things well" (Mark 7:37).

Use your talents for Christ and His church.

We should use our knowledge, skills, and abilities in the pursuit of excellence.

Every skill given to us by God is needed for the Lord's work; the church needs you.

1 Peter 4:10 commands, "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

We are directed to faithfully employ all of our God-given spiritual gifts.

When we do not use what God has equipped us with, we are like the one talent man who hid his.

Give God your absolute best and in the end He will say, "Well done."

III. Jesus will say, "Well done, good and faithful slave."

"Good" is the same term used in Matthew 19:17, where Jesus said, "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments."

To be good is to be godlike.

To be like God is to be a loving person, "for God is love" (1 John 4:8).

Love is the more excellent way (1 Corinthians 12:31 and following).

Since Jesus promised in John 5:28 and 29, "all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment" a wise person strives to be good and do good.

Do you strive to be godlike?

Do you endeavor to do godly things in godly ways?

IV. Jesus will say, “Well done, good and *faithful slave*.”

What does God mean by “faithful slave”?

Jesus defined “faithful slave” in the previous chapter (Matthew 24:45 and 46), when He spoke, “Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes.”

A faithful slave can be counted on to do what the Master wants at any given time.

A faithful Christian is someone God can depend on to be Christlike and strive to become more Christlike.

Can God depend on you and me/us to be His faithful slaves?

V. Jesus will say, “Well done, good and *faithful slave*.”

The term “slave” identifies a person who is legally owned by someone else and whose entire livelihood and purpose are determined by their master.

A slave serves his/her master.

Jesus drew the line and told us we must choose our master.

Choose whom you will serve.

Not all service is good, as some serve mammon/money (Matthew 6:24), some serve misunderstood religion (John 16:2; Galatians 4:8), some serve the creature in idolatry (Romans 1:25), some serve sin (Romans 6:6), and others, serve their own belly or selfish desires (Romans 16:17).

The writer of Hebrews penned, “Since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe.”

We can serve ourselves, other vain pursuits, or we can serve God with reverence and awe.

Since God has given us “a kingdom which cannot be shaken,” what should our choice of master be?

We should serve God out of gratitude, showing our gratitude for what He has done for us.

Look for areas to serve in the worship services.

Do not be one of those who have to be “drafted” into such service or the type of person that needs constant prodding.

Faithful slaves willingly, gladly do what is needed for their master.

Christians serve Christ willingly; in fact, 1 Peter 4:11 says, “...whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

If you do not know how to do a certain area of service, take the initiative to learn, and gain other talents.

Commit to learning how to do what needs to be done.

After learning how, if the skill or talent is not yours, try something else.

Jesus promised in the latter part of John 12:26, “If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.”

To serve means to address the wants and needs of others, so look for areas to serve others outside the walls of the building that will bring people to the building to worship, to glorify your Father in heaven.

Do you serve God and His Son, or do you serve self, sin, or Satan?

Application:

When we pursue Biblical excellence, we are striving to be better Christians.

The desire to improve our Christian walk and talk for God should be constantly on our minds.

Now is the time to pursue excellence in everything done for God.

The elders of this congregation have chosen to pursue excellence.

The elders are equipping themselves to do more things for God and do them well.

The elders are working to be more Godlike and more faithful in their service of shepherding.

The elders are striving to better serve you for Christ's sake.

Will you "approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God"?

Will you pursue excellence or resist improvement?

Conclusion:

God is looking for followers who will do something, do it well, do it in a godly way, do it faithfully, and do it as a service for Him.

When Jesus comes again, He is going to be looking for faith on the earth (Luke 18:8).

Where He finds faithful service, He will reward it as He said, "Be faithful until death and I will give you the crown of life (Revelation 2:10b).

If our master were to return right now, would you hear the judgment, "Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master?"

Could it be said of you, "You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed. Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my money back with interest. Therefore take away the talent from him [or her], and give it to the one who has the ten talents" (Matthew 25:26-28)?

Jesus has given His life for us.

To be found faithful slaves, He calls us to believe and trust in Him (Acts 16:30-31), repent of our sins from which we need to be saved (Acts 17:30-31), acknowledge our belief in Him (Romans 10:9-10), and be baptized for the forgiveness of our sins (Acts 2:38), then be faithful until death (Revelation 2:10).

God will reward those who pursue excellence in their service to Him with the crown of life.