

The Servant's Reward

Clergy and Laity

Before we study the Servant's Reward we need to deal with the very touchy question of the clergy/laity divide; which has two extremes:

1. The clergy and the laity are very different at the level of salvation, one saves the other. In this false view, God is represented by the clergy who are mediators with God for the saints, and you need to confess your sins to the clergy, who are priests standing between you and God. However, this is false because there is only one Mediator between God and Man, Christ Jesus:

1 Timothy 2:5-6 *For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, (6) who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.*

The book of Hebrews makes it abundantly clear that there are no priests standing between Christians and God. Every Christian can pray directly to Jesus Christ (Hebrews 4:14-16).

2. The clergy and the laity have no spiritual difference whatsoever. In this false view, full-time clergy have zero spiritual authority, are not special in any way and that Christians can just take it upon themselves be a pastor or a Bible teacher. However, it is clear that the Holy Spirit appoints some people to offices such as apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor-teacher (Ephesians 4:11,12) and makes them overseers over the "flock". Being an overseer is regarded as "an office" requiring certain qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

Acts 20:28 *Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. (see also 1 Peter 5:1-4, 1 Timothy 5:17, Hebrews 13:17))*

So, there are "overseers" who have charge over "the flock", and who will have to give an account for their leadership (Hebrews 13:17). These overseers however are to be servant leaders and not domineering (1 Peter 5:1-4). Teaching elders are worthy of double honor (1 Timothy 5:17) but also get double the judgement (James 3:1)!

Also, some of God's servants are clearly different in that they are set apart, by God, in a special way for the work of the gospel. Paul had a strong sense of being called and appointed:

Romans 1:1 *Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,*

2 Timothy 1:11-12 *for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do...*

And in Acts we find that Paul was God's "chosen instrument":

Acts 9:15 *But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel."*

Therefore, there is quite a large difference between the clergy and the laity, however it is not a difference in some fundamental spiritual nature, but a difference in God's appointing and calling. The overseers, elders, deacons, pastors, teachers, evangelists, prophets and apostles are primarily foot-washing servant leaders (Matthew 20:25-28, Luke 22:24-30, John 13:1-17) who are not to lord it over the flock (1 Peter 5:3) but to serve the saints in spiritual matters and are to be honored by them in material matters (1 Corinthians 9:11).

The Master's Will

A servant is only rewarded if he or she carries out the Master's will. God assigns our gifts and our calling. If the master says, go and cook dinner, and the servant decides to chop firewood instead, the servant is not rewarded. Chopping firewood can be exhausting hard work, however it is the wrong kind of hard work at that time! A noted Pentecostal evangelist in the 1950's decided to give up evangelism, which was not paying very well, and became a Bible teacher in 1960 and ended up teaching false doctrine, many attempted to correct him, but he refused correction, as a result he died early, in a car accident in 1965. Jonah and Moses both tried to avoid the calling of the Lord to their respective specific tasks, while Mary, the mother of Jesus gave the correct response:

Luke 1:38 *And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."*

If God has called you to a specific ministry task, then you must do that exact thing, and not run away from it, and you must not choose to do something else instead that you perhaps feel better suited for.

The first level of the Master's Will is the generally revealed will of God. All of God's servants must be merciful, righteous, honest, kind, loving and faithful. We should not be boastful or immoral or a lover of money. There are many exhortations in 1 Corinthians, and in the pastoral epistles (1&2 Timothy & Titus) that tell the Lord's servants how to live in the general will of God and here is just one of them:

1 Timothy 4:11-16 *Command and teach these things. (12) Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. (13) Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. (14) Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. (15) Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. (16) Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.*

Apparently, there are some servants that refused to carry out the Father's will:

Matthew 21:28-32 *"What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' (29) And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went. (30) And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go. (31) Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. (32) For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.*

The second level of the Master's Will is the faithful calling, a specific assigned task, that we are to do. The parables of the ten talents (Matthew 25:14-30) and the five minas (Luke 19:13-27) make it clear that there are good servants and wicked servants and the good servants eagerly carry out the will of God that has been assigned to them to do, while the wicked servants refuse to do so. Jesus, in Matthew 24, makes the point with great force:

Matthew 24:45-51 *"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? (46) Blessed is that servant whom his master*

will find so doing when he comes. (47) Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. (48) But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' (49) and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, (50) the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know (51) and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Rewarded at The Last Judgement:

Revelation 11:18 *The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth."*

All of the servant parables deal with rendering an account when the Master returns. In Matthew 19:27-30 the apostles will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel, during the Millennium. In the verse in Revelation quoted above it is at the end of the age, that "the time has come" for rewarding the saints and servants of God. We are not to expect vast material rewards in this life. Many great servants of God have lived very humble lives.

Servant Leadership

Luke 22:24-30 *A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. (25) And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. (26) But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. (27) For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves. (28) "You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, (29) and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, (30) that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

God's servants are not to "beat the sheep", to be domineering or to lord it over them (1 Peter 5:1-4). The leader is to be "as one who serves" and not to be a special kind of elitist. The elitism of some clergy and the spiritual abuse they have heaped on their flocks has led to widespread rebellion and total disrespect of them in many quarters. In John 13, Jesus washes the feet of the disciples and then instructs them to have that same attitude toward one another.

Faithful Service Even in Small Things:

Luke 19:12-26 *"A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. (13) And having called ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business till I come.' ...(16) Then came the first, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned ten minas.' (17) And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.' (18) And the second came, saying, 'Master, your mina made five minas.' (19) Likewise, he said to him, 'You also be over five cities.' (20) Then another came, saying, 'Master, behold your mina, which I had laid away in a handkerchief.... (24) And he said to those standing by, 'Take the mina away from him, and give it to him who has ten minas.' (25) "But they said to him, 'Master, he has ten minas.' (26) For I say to you that to everyone who has, more shall be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him..." (see also the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:15-30)*

The nobleman rewards his good servants on the basis of faithfulness in small things: *'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.'* The nobleman rewards tested character. The assigned task was a test not just of competence, but of character. Jesus makes this clear in **Luke 16:10** *"One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much."* Psychologists talk about the shopping cart theory. The person who always returns the shopping cart has a better character than the person who just leaves it abandoned in the parking area. The little things say a lot about who we really are! God observes us closely as do His heavenly Watchers (Daniel 4:17) and even the hairs on our head are numbered (Matthew 10:30) and our acts of loyalty to God are written down in His books (Malachi 3:16). Mordecai was faithful in reporting an assassination plot, and later was greatly rewarded by the King (Esther chapter 6)! A pastor who is faithful in shepherding a rural congregation of 15 people can still receive a great reward on the day of judgment because he will be found "faithful in very little".

Enduring Quality:

1 Corinthians 3:5-15 *Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord has given to each one? (6) I planted, Apollos watered, but God gives the increase. (7) So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. (8) Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. (9) For we are coworkers with God; you are God's field, you are God's building. (10) According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise architect I have laid the foundation, but another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. (11) For no other foundation can anyone lay, other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (12) Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, (13) each one's work shall be made manifest; for the Day shall reveal it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall test each one's work, as to what sort it is. (14) If anyone's work which he has built remains, he shall receive a reward. (15) If anyone's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, but so as through fire.*

Quality is more important than quantity. A haystack is large but does not survive the fire of testing, a diamond ring is small but will pass the test. God wants us to build with gold, silver and precious stones! He does not want us to build with wood, hay or stubble. The quality of our service matters. How well did we love people? Were we holy in our speech, life and conduct? How deeply did we pray? How solid and true was our doctrine? Did we build on the foundation that is Christ alone or upon human philosophy, or on myths and legends invented by men and women? Did we seek human approval or did we seek God's approval (Galatians 1:10, 1 Thessalonians 2:4)? We need to deliberately aim at quality, quality is not an accident. "Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction and skillful execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives." – William Foster This may include deep study; I was greatly blessed in my ministry because I was able to obtain a good theological education from a sound biblical seminary. Quality involves self-discipline, tough choices and a determination to pursue excellence in ministry!

The Crown of Glory :

1 Peter 5:1-4 *The elders who are among you I exhort, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed; (2) shepherd the flock of God among you, overseeing not by compulsion, but rather willingly, not in fondness for dishonest gain, but rather eagerly; (3) nor as being masters over the flock under you, but rather being examples to the flock. (4) And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*

The apostle Peter instructs his fellow elders to have good ethics (not for dishonest gain, not being overbearing, not as an onerous duty) and to lead by example, rather than by force. A good elder, who follows these rules, will receive the unfading crown of glory. Notice the humility of the apostle. He does not call himself the Chief Shepherd even though Christ had made him the leader of the church! Peter just saw himself as a “fellow elder”, the Chief Shepherd was Christ alone. Again, the reward is given at the appearing of the Lord.

Sacrificial Service:

1 Corinthians 9:14-18 *In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. (15) But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting. (16) For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! (17) For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. (18) What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.*

Paul was entitled to get his living from the gospel, however he chose to be a bivocational (“working pastor”) so that he could present the gospel free of charge to the Gentiles. As a result, Paul would get a reward in Heaven for what he gave up for the sake of the gospel. Many clergy these days are bivocational because of various factors causing a decline in support, some, for instance, do supply teaching in local schools. Those who make significant financial sacrifices for the sake of the gospel will gain a reward from Christ on that Day.

Most missionaries do not charge their hearers or expect tithes or offerings from the churches that they establish. Occasionally this causes problems when they turn the church over to a national pastor, who does need to be paid from local tithes and offerings. The missionary should spend time training the church in how to financially support their pastor before the missionary moves on. Pastors are generally paid by the local congregation; however Bible teachers, missionaries and evangelists may rely on supporters or on their own business efforts (such as selling books).

Does a well-paid pastor receive no reward? That would be reading way too much into this text! They will certainly receive the reward of being a faithful shepherd of the flock, the crown of glory above. However, those who suffer for the sake of the gospel get an extra reward of some kind.

Conclusion

The servants of God (elders, overseers, pastors, teachers, evangelists, prophets, apostles etc.) are set apart by God for the work of the ministry and are rewarded for faithfully doing the Master’s Will, even in small things, and doing so with works that have integrity and very high quality, and for their sacrificial service to God, for which they will receive the crown of glory on the Day of Judgment. They must not be domineering but must be servant leaders, taking care of the flock and living consistent Christian lifestyles that are a good example to all of those they care for.