

The Disciple's Reward

In this study we will look at four important Bible passages that teach us how God rewards everyday Christian living that is led by faith and done out of obedience to the word of God. They are:

Matthew 6:1-6 *“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. (2) “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. (3) But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, (4) so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (5) “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. (6) But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

Luke 6:31-36 *And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. (32) “If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. (33) And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. (34) And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. (35) But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. (36) Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*

Luke 14:12-14 *He said also to the man who had invited him, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. (13) But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, (14) and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid (rewarded) at the resurrection of the just.”*

Matthew 10:37-42 *Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (38) And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. (39) Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (40) “Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. (41) The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. (42) And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”*

What are the first duties of every Christian disciple? To love God, and to love one's neighbour as oneself. This involves being unselfish, generous and kind. These passages tell us that heaven notices a difference between the selfish, cold and poorly-lived life and the loving, kind, generous well-lived life. Selfish people are roundly condemned in many parables such as the Rich Fool, Lazarus and the Rich Man, and the Sheep and the Goats (where they fail to help the hungry, naked and imprisoned). By contrast, the Good Samaritan is unselfish, kind, generous and is moved by compassion. Compassion is the most frequent emotion of Jesus and is mentioned 11 times in the Gospels. We are to walk as He

walked (1 John 2:6), sharing His priorities and choices. As new creations we are called to do the good deeds that God has foreordained for us to do (Ephesians 2:10) and it is as we perform these good deeds that we earn our reward, but not our salvation, which is a free gift (Ephesians 2:8,9).

Our First Passage, Matthew 6:1-6 above, tells us that our good deeds should not be publicized, rather they should be done in secret, not shared on YouTube! If we publicize our good deeds, for the purpose of gaining funds or the approval of others, then we lose our heavenly reward. When we are “seen by others” we receive our reward in this life and not in the Millennium. If you rescue a puppy or fix someone’s tire you don’t need to make a dramatic video about it! Be a disciple not a trumpet-blower! You should give in secret, you should pray in secret, you should fast without telling any but those who need to know, and your left hand should not know what your right hand is doing. Your good deeds are between you and the Lord!

If we seek publicity and approval then “*you will have no reward from your Father who is in Heaven*” (Matthew 6:1). If we preach or teach for human approval then God forgets about our sermon, it is not written down in His books for future reward. If I write should these Bible studies to get applause, then God will not notice the effort that I have put into them. This is a hard and difficult truth because we naturally love getting attention and approval from others.

Our audience should be “an audience of One”, that is our only audience should be God. When God is our audience we can be a truth-teller like the apostle Paul!

Galatians 1:10 *For now do I persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I would not be a servant of Christ.*

Our Second Passage, Luke 6:31-36 is absolutely full of essential commands for the Christian disciple, the first of which is known as The Golden Rule: *And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.* And its parallel passage is found in Matthew 7:12: “*So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*” These verses indicate that we should not be self-centered, that other people are genuinely equal to us, that we should serve them, and that we should be highly considerate of their needs. It helps us to get out of our heads when we ask “What would I want done to me, if I was in the other person’s situation”? If we would like others to pray for us, then we should also pray for them. If we enjoy being encouraged, then we should also encourage others. If being given gifts makes us happy, we should give to others also, remembering that it is better to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

Other religions have the Golden Rule in its negative form occasionally referred to as the Silver Rule: “Do not do unto others what you would not want done unto you”. The Silver Rule is passive, we are not required to do anything out of compassion, rather they are to merely avoid being nasty. It allows people to do nothing at all. Jesus teaches us this positive version, this proactive version, of actually doing to others the good things that we would like done to us.

Leadership coaches have invented the Platinum Rule: *The Platinum Rule is a principle that advocates treating others the way they want to be treated, rather than how one would want to be treated oneself. This concept is presented as a more empathetic and effective alternative to the Golden Rule, which suggests treating others as one would like to be treated. The Platinum Rule emphasizes understanding individual preferences, needs, and communication styles, recognizing that people have diverse ways of being supported and valued.*

God rewards us for being a decent, kind, thoughtful and considerate human being. The Lord treats us in the same manner as we treat others, such as:

Matthew 5:7 *“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*

Matthew 6:14-15 *For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, (15) but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

If we treat others well, if we are kind to the poor and needy, if we lend to those who cannot pay us back, then God will treat us well in return! Which leads to the next batch of verses from Luke 6! (33) *And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. (34) And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. (35) But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.*

Jesus is asking us to do good works that are contrary to self-centered fallen human nature. He is telling us that reciprocity gains no reward from the heavenly father, but rather we are love our enemies, and to do good and lend expecting nothing in return. These acts which go far beyond what common duty or ethical obligation requires are known in philosophy as “supererogatory acts” and here is the Wikipedia definition¹:

Supererogation ([Late Latin](#): *supererogatio* "payment beyond what is needed or asked", from *super* "beyond" and *erogare* "to pay out, expend", itself from *ex* "out" and *rogare* "to ask") is the performance of more than is asked for; the action of doing more than [duty](#) requires.^[1] In [ethics](#), an act is **supererogatory** if it is good but not morally required to be done. It refers to an act that is more than is necessary, when another course of action—involving less—would still be an acceptable action. It differs from a duty, which is an act wrong not to do, and from acts morally neutral. Supererogation may be considered as performing above and beyond a normative course of duty to further benefits and functionality.

[This is different from the Roman Catholic doctrine of supererogatory works, where saints, who have done more than necessary for salvation, can use their heavenly rewards to perform miracles for those who pray to them, this is definitely NOT biblical, and we should not pray to saints or to anyone, or anything, other than God.]

It is not strictly ethically necessary to turn the other cheek, to pray for those who persecute you, to love your enemies or to lend to others without expecting any return. There is no law on earth that can compel you to lend you hard-earned cash to someone whom you know will never pay you back. However, God, as usual has other ideas:

Proverbs 19:17 *Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.*

When we lend money to someone who cannot pay it back, we are actually lending to God, and He will repay us with a reward. Such actions make us “sons of the Most High” (Luke 6:35), that is, when done

¹¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supererogation>

on a consistent basis they indicate that we have a new nature, not a fallen grasping nature. We become “sons” of God by sharing in His divine nature and our God is kind to the ungrateful and evil.

This leads us to the last exhortation in our Luke 6 passage: *Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.* The reason for being merciful is because our Father is merciful. We are to be imitators of God (Ephesians 5:1). The disciples reward comes about when he or she shares in the nature of God by displaying mercy towards others. The mercy in us is a divine thing, a heavenly thing. This requirement for a merciful heart is set forth in the stark contrasts of the parable of the Sheep and the Goats:

Matthew 25:34-40 *Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. (35) For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, (36) I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ (37) Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? (38) And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? (39) And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ (40) And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’*

This passage tells us that being merciful to others is counted as being merciful to God Himself! Such mercy also displays that we have a changed heart, and are a new creation, and are fit to enter into the heavenly realms, possess eternal life and inherit the Kingdom prepared for us from before the foundation of the world! What a mighty reward! (On the other hand, the cold-hearted, selfish “goats” in Matthew 25 are rejected by the King and suffer eternal punishment).

Why should we bother? That is the main question that the hard-hearted throw toward the merciful. The merciful are regarded as fools in this world. The merciful are viewed as just wasting their time and their money. The hard-hearted will say “If I am going to give my money away, it will only be to members of my own family!”. There are many who speak against any act of charity as “just creating dependence” and who scoff at foreign aid and assistance programs. While such Programs may need careful accounting, we are to be glad and generous givers “for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Our Third Passage is from Luke 14:12-14 and it tells us to invite those on the margins of society (the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind) into our social circle, and to be a blessing to those who can never repay us. It also tells us the timing of our rewards: “at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 12:14). I know of several churches that have taken this passage literally and who have real feasts for “those whom most consider least,” and these feasts are a deep spiritual ministry to people who have never been seen or acknowledged.

Ministering to those whom most consider least does not just change them, it also changes us and turns our social priorities right way up! The rather elite Roman church that included members from Caesar’s palace and the city treasurer was exhorted by Paul the apostle to rearrange things:

Romans 12:16 *Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.*

In James 2:1-11 there is an extensive prophetic rebuke about treating rich Christians with honor while treating poor Christians with dishonor, the core of which is:

James 2:3-4 *and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," (4) have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*

God wants to change our hearts by getting us to love, acknowledge, serve and socialize with the marginalized. We bless them, and they change us, and God rejoices when we step out of our comfort zone to accomplish this!

God treats us in the same manner as we treat others and honors us when we honor others, particularly when we honor the poor and welcome in those whom most consider least. Who are the untouchables in your social group? In my city in Australia in the 1980's it was Aboriginals, HIV patients and the mentally ill. A friend of mine, Dave Andrews and his wife Angie went and lived among them so as to carry out these specific verses in Luke. Dave and Angie built a Christian community among them that is still going strong today! Another friend of mine, Viv Grigg, went and lived in the urban slums in Manila and wrote the book *Companion to the Poor*. These people have given their lives to serve those whom most consider least and they will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.

Our Final Passage in this section is Matthew 10:37-42 and it is about the Disciple's Cross which is price of self-sacrifice as we follow Christ and enter into the Kingdom of God. It begins with some very stern demands: *Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (38) And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.*

Jesus is demanding that we totally rearrange our natural priorities and instead adopt spiritual priorities. The cross is where we die to the natural life and come into the spiritual life. Our natural life is gone to the extent that Paul could say "I no longer live":

Galatians 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Galatians 5:24 *And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

Galatians 6:14-15 *But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (15) For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.*

This complete break with our natural priorities, our natural life goals, our natural and socially accepted way of being, is so severe that, in some cases, especially persecution, we are not allowed to cling to family members such as our parents, or even our children. This leads naturally to the next verse: (39) *Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.* Here are some parallel passages:

Matthew 16:24-27 *Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. (25) For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (26) For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? (27) For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and **then he will repay each person according to what he has done.***

John 12:25-26 *Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. (26) If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. **If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.***

In these passages the heavenly reward is somehow connected to "losing" one's life in this world. What does that mean? Losing one's "life" is the act of renunciation. The act of saying "No" to corrupting temptations such as greed, personal ambition, pride, selfishness, immorality and emotional cruelty. It is saying "No" to the job that requires you to tell lies, keep a second set of books, or be dishonest with customers. It is walking out the door when people force you to disown your faith in Jesus Christ.

This renunciation used to be part of the common baptismal formula: "Do you renounce the Devil and all of his works?" (Why evangelical churches leave this out is beyond me) and thus the new convert is told that becoming a Christian is a complete break with everything that is evil.

Once we decide to make a complete break with evil, and particularly with evil that feels good, it is then that we start to find our new life in Christ. When the addict is addicted, he or she is losing all things (health, family etc.) for one thing (the addiction), however when the addict finds Christ and is saved and gives up their addiction they lose one thing (the addiction) to gain all things, which are their salvation, their health, their family back and so on. Unfortunately, we are naturally addicted to sin, and it is only once we renounce sin through repentance, and put our faith in Jesus Christ that we can find new and eternal life!

Once we take up our Cross and die to self and to sin, and lose our life in this world, then we move into the place where the Father will reward us and honor us (Matthew 16:27, John 12:26 above). This will occur when the Son of Man comes in glory with his angels. That is, at the return of Jesus Christ.

At that point those who honor the righteous will be honored: *(41) The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. (42) And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."*

These verses probably mainly apply to the time of the Great Tribulation when just giving a cup of water to a Christian disciple, who will not be allowed to buy or sell (Revelation 13:17), will be a radical act. These heroic helpers will by no means lose their reward. In the calculus of God, those who receive Christ's messengers, are viewed as receiving Christ Himself, and those who receive Christ are viewed as actually receiving the Father. Thus, as Christian disciples, we can earn heavenly rewards as we go through our daily lives by doing our good deeds in all humility, by loving our enemies, being kind and merciful to all, by taking up our cross, and by being hospitable to the very servants of the Lord.