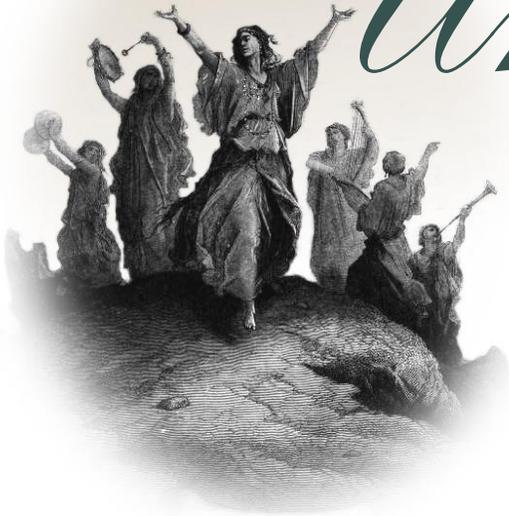


In Unison



The trumpeters and
singers joined in unison,
as with one voice, to
give praise and thanks
to the Lord.
2 Chronicles 5:13

Excellence: Why?

H

*ave you ever wondered
how different things might be if
God the Father adopted toward us
the attitude we often have toward
Him?*

How would things be different if the Father approached our needs with the same, lackadaisical attitude we often have toward His needs and service? It might sound something like this...

The Time: Eternity past

The Place: Heaven

God the Father and God the Son are having a last-minute discussion prior to the latter's departure for Bethlehem.

Father: You have everything you need?

Son: I think so. Don't really need much.

Father: Right. Well, here's just a few last-minute notes before you leave. Listen, I like these people, I really do. But I don't see any reason to break a sweat for them. They'll probably go along with our plan no matter what, so let's just take it easy. Now, about your disciples . . .

Son: Right. Twelve of them.

Father: Well, I've been giving that some thought. We really don't need all twelve. Ten would do just as well. I think we could get the point across just fine if we left these names off. *(hands the Son a list of names)*

Son *(reading the list):* Matthew and John?

Father: Right. Who needs four different versions of your story? Two will do. Now, about this crucifixion business.

Son: You wanted me to die on a cross, didn't you?

Father: I've been rethinking that, too. That's really going to a lot of bother—I mean, all that blood and pain and death . . . and then there'd be the business of the resurrection. What a hassle! Wouldn't it be a lot easier if we just had you scourged, then run out of town? A lot cleaner, don't you think? I think being

whipped will say a lot about your love for the people. After all, we know none of them would voluntarily go through that for you.

Son: Well, if you say so. But I'm willing to die if you want me to.

Father: Hey, why bother...

Ludicrous, isn't it. We can be grateful that that isn't what really happened. What really happened was that the triune Godhead loved us so unspeakably much that they willingly suffered separation and a tortuous death on our behalf. For us. They gave their very best—the very best thing that has ever existed in all of time and before: Jesus—just to save our wretched souls.

Yet still people will ask "why?" Why should I expend the energy and time to reach toward excellence? After all, we live in a state of grace: we don't earn our way into heaven. Isn't all this talk of excellence and hard work just an attempt to make us into something we're not? After all, God isn't impressed with flash and glitter—and we're certainly not supposed to be trying to impress each other.

Impressed

God is impressed with us, no matter what. He can be impressed by our faithfulness, our devotion and giving heart—or he can be impressed by our sloth, and the low value we have placed on the sacrifice of His Son.

The righteous person serves God with joyous excellence and a commitment to both His worship and the needs of the body, out of the gratitude of a forgiven heart.

And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things

he might have the preeminence. Colossians 1:17-18

“Where can you taste the joys of obeying unless He bids you do something for which His bidding is the only reason?”

(C.S. Lewis, *Perelandra*)



The human response to the Lord's abundant generosity is gratitude, and gratitude is played out in a tangible way in our service to God and His people.

Never let the anti-legalist—the grace fanatic for whom any “works” are seen as the believer buying his or her way into God's heart—never let this one remove for you the exquisite joy of serving Him from a grateful heart. We *do* live under grace, and there is nothing we can do that will impress God, or improve upon the grace He already bestows based on His love alone.

But nowhere does it say we cannot—based on the pure intentions of a grateful heart—give back gladly to our loving, generous Father in the form of service and praise, in recognition of what He has already done for us.

*Give thanks with a grateful heart,
Give thanks to the Holy One;
Give thanks because He's given
Jesus Christ, His Son.
And now let the weak say
I am strong,
Let the poor say
I am rich
Because of what the Lord
has done for us.*

Henry Smith

“Divine goodness, as one of God's attributes, is self-caused, infinite, perfect, and eternal. The cause of His goodness is in Himself; the recipients of His goodness are all His beneficiaries without merit and without recompense.” A.W. Tozer

Scripture

"So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

Matthew 6:31-33

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Matthew 16:24

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long

way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple." Luke 14:25-33

You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.

1 Corinthians 7:23

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. Colossians 1:13-18

Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down be-

fore the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang:

"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"

The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped. Revelation 5:6-14

Hymns and Choruses

Jesus Paid it All (Hall)

Jesus paid it all,
All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross (Watts)

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

I'll Live For Him (Hudson)

O Thou who died on Calvary,
To save my soul and make me free,
I'll consecrate my life to Thee,
My Savior and my God!

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