

Faithfulness versus Fruitfulness

7/11/2015

Saturday

Pray for Me

On a Saturday morning I received a letter from a reader requesting that I pray for him because he has been feeling discouraged. He was leaving to go on a mission trip overseas for a couple of weeks, taking Free Grace tracks and copies of the Gospel of John with him that he had ordered especially for this trip. One would think that he would be exuberant over taking his first mission trip. However, such was not the case. He had just graduated from college and was comparing his life to that of an acquaintance on Facebook who had taken many mission trips during her college experience. By comparison, he felt that he had accomplished nothing during his college experience. Never mind that during his college experience he had, by his own admission in the letter, sent letters to witness to non-believing friends, publically spoken of Jesus in front of one of his classes at the secular university he was attending, and tried to witness to others during the course of his college years. Yet he felt that his time had been pretty much useless because of his lack of fruitfulness. He was requesting prayer that “somehow, someday” the Lord will use him on the trip and “be pleased.”

I cannot honor this prayer request as presented, however, because this letter shows a fundamental misperception as to what is necessary to please the Lord. I cannot come before the Lord and ask Him to honor a request that is so fundamentally flawed, at least not in the way it was originally worded. On the hand, I can respond to the letter with the intent of correcting that fundamental flaw and pray that the Lord will use my response to adjust the reader’s attitude. Further, I can pray that the reader who sent this letter will have a fruitful missionary endeavor and that the Lord will be pleased *with the results*. The defect in the letter, though, was that it evidenced a belief that the Lord is displeased with us if we are not fruitful in the impact we have on others. Such a serious misperception can be depressing and dangerous. Among other things, it can completely discourage the faithful while encouraging the unfaithful. Those producing the greatest numeric results are in grave danger of wrongly equating that success with faithfulness.

At the heart of this issue lies two questions: (1) Must we be fruitful in terms of the impact we have on others in our service to the Lord in order for the Lord to be pleased with us? (2) If we are fruitful in terms of the impact we have on others in our service to the Lord, does this necessarily prove that the Lord is pleased with us? In short, does it take success to please the Lord, and does success prove that we have pleased the Lord?

Pleasing the Lord

That Saturday night I finally finished reading the latest edition of Joseph Dillow’s magnum opus on rewards, *Final Destiny*. In the closing pages I read that night, he concludes: “Finally, and most importantly, we must not forget that the requirement God places on us for obtaining reward in the Christian life is faithfulness and not success. Faithful is something we can all be, and that is all God demands.”¹ I concur. For this reason, I could not pray that the Lord would grant the reader success so that the Lord would be pleased *with him*. Much more importantly, I will pray that the Lord will grant the reader the maturity to understand that the Lord is pleased with us if we are faithful despite the lack of impact it may have on others. Being faithful is so much easier when we are fruitful. Conversely, being faithful when we are not fruitful is tough as nails. I know.

In those closing pages, on this very page no less, Dillow also said of my book, *The Outer Darkness*: “Marty Cauley’s work on the *Darkness Outside* may be the most extensive and thorough discussion of this theme in the history of the Church.”² He was listing my book along with other significant books by various Free Grace authors in order to prove that Free Grace is a scholarly perspective. To be listed with such well-known authors is an honor. Yet my book has not had nearly the impact as the other books. I am a comparatively unknown author with little public profile. My books will have nowhere near the circulation, and thus impact, as that of the other authors he lists. Should I then wallow in self-pity and conclude that the Lord is displeased with me? Hardly!

Yet I can empathize with the reader because every day I have to fight the temptation to conclude that my books are in vain because they will have so little circulation or impact compared to such authors. If I were to fall into the trap that this reader has fallen into, I would not have the strength to work so hard on my books. Yes, I will pray that the Lord bless the reader to be fruitful, just as I pray that my books will be fruitful. However, it is much, much more important that we understand that the Lord is far more concerned about our faithfulness than our numeric fruitfulness. One can have one without the other.

¹ Joseph Dillow, *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*, 20th edition (Monument, CO: Paniym Group, 2014), 1014.

² Ibid.

An Example

As it turns out, this reader is currently reading my book, *Mere Christianity and Moral Christianity*. Among other things, this book critiques C. S. Lewis' classic, *Mere Christianity*. The reader is simultaneously reading Lewis' classic book, which has wide circulation, while he reads my book which interacts with it. Yet the reader remarked that he could not understand why this book by Lewis was a classic. It has major defects that are very apparent to the reader. So I will use these books as an example to which that reader can easily relate and thus hopefully correct his priorities. If I were to compare my book to Lewis' book, like the reader is doing to his acquaintance, then I could wallow in depression because my book does not have any impact in comparison. However, I would be a fool to do so for several reasons.

First, Lewis' book is soteriologically defective.³ It teaches conditional security, conditioning entrance into Heaven on performance. Since the Bible teaches that we cannot be saved through this means, it is quite possible that Lewis was never saved. He might spend eternity in hell, although he was a very popular and successful *Christian* author. The word *Christian* in such a statement is being used to denote a public follower of Christ. Not all public followers of Christ are biblical believers. Second, even if Lewis was a believer, much of his fruit will go up in smoke at the Bema as worthless because it led people away with defective soteriology. The Lord may reject much, if not most, of his life's work as worthless as a result. Third, even if Lewis turns out to be a believer and the Lord decides that the good he did significantly outweighed the bad, so as to grant him rulership in the kingdom, I have no reason to think that the Lord would be less pleased with my books, which are soteriologically and misthologically far more accurate.⁴ To the contrary, knowing that the Lord wants us to interpret His word accurately gives me confidence that He will be pleased with my endeavors in this regard. I am not faultless, to be sure, but I am certainly more accurate than Lewis. Fourth, as Dillow has correctly observed, misthologically comparing ourselves with others is a fool's errand.

Similarly, for this reader to compare himself to his acquaintance is foolhardy. First, many successful Christians to whom we may be tempted to compare ourselves may not even be genuine believers. Second, even if they are genuine believers who have at least at some time in the past believed a sufficiently clear gospel, they may not be presenting the gospel clearly enough to please the Lord, regardless of however much apparent fruit they are generating. Third, even if the Lord does decide to grant them kingdom rulership despite their lack of accuracy in their gospel presentations, we have no reason to think that the Lord will be less pleased with us if we have been more accurate though less fruitful. Fourth, comparing ourselves with others to determine our misthological value is wrongheaded to begin with. Dillow has an excellent discussion of the laborers in the vineyard which illustrates that point. The ones who were the most productive are the ones criticized, told to depart, and ranked last (Mt 20:1-16).

Sunday*Missionaries*

The next day, Sunday, our pastor related a conversation he had just had with a missionary friend in the Philippines who was very discouraged. We must not think that just because missionaries are faithfully serving the Lord that they are not subject to discouragement. What if we were to tell them that the Lord's being pleased with them is in direct relationship to their fruitfulness? Would this not discourage many of them? Might they not leave the missionary field if it is not proving fruitful? The Bible teaches that some plant while others reap: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages *according to his labor*" (1Cor 3:1). Note that Paul does not say that God will reward those who plant and water *according to their fruitfulness*. Thankfully and rightfully so! Some missionaries see very little in terms of results but lay a groundwork that enables their successor to come in and reap the harvest. But both the sower and the reaper will mutually be rewarded for the harvest: "Already he who reaps is receiving wages, and is gathering fruit for life eternal; that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together" (Jn 4:35).

Granted, the sower and reaper will be rewarded, at least in part, in accordance with their results. Their receiving "a full reward" would be dependent not only on their faithfulness and fruitfulness but also upon the stability and maturity of their fruit (2Jn 1:8; cp. Phil 4:1; 1Thess 2:19-20; 3:5,8). On the other hand, we must not conclude too hastily that the *full reward* of all the Lord's servants in every case is dependent upon the faithfulness and fruitfulness it produces in the lives of others. Servants will be rewarded according to their opportunities. Some may not be in situations where they will be very fruitful in the impact they have in the lives of others. During this same sermon the pastor pointed out that Jeremiah faithfully served the Lord in preaching to the people of Israel but was very disappointed with the impact it had in their

³ **Soteriology** is based on two biblical Greek words, *soteria* (*salvation*) and *logos* (*teaching*), and correspondingly refers to biblical teaching about salvation. Although the biblical concept of salvation includes many dimensions other than deliverance from hell, it is this aspect of salvation to which writers refer frequently when they use the word soteriology.

⁴ **Misthology** is a coined term derived from the Greek words *misthos* (*reward*) and *logos* (*teaching*) and is used herein to refer to the doctrine of eternal rewards.

lives. Are we to conclude that the Lord was disappointed with Jeremiah because of his lack of fruitfulness? Of course not! To the contrary, the Lord will be well pleased with his faithfulness despite his lack of fruitfulness. Moreover, even when faithful servants do not receive as full a reward as they would have received otherwise—if they had been more successful in producing stable fruit in terms of their impact on others—we must still conclude that these faithful servants will receive sufficient reward to inherit rulership positions in the coming kingdom. If nothing else, the case of the servant who received one mina and produced five would support that conclusion: “You are to be over five cities (Lk 19:19).

Minas

Nevertheless, even that assessment is too bleak. Admittedly, the servant who produced *the most*, the ten mina (from the one he received initially) receives the higher commendation. Even so, note the actual wording of commendation: “Well done, good slave, **because you have been faithful** in a very little thing, be in authority over ten cities” (Lk 19:17). What must not be lost sight of is that the Lord’s focus is on *faithfulness*. Although the servants are focused solely on fruitfulness, the Lord is focused exclusively on faithfulness. Fruitfulness is used to picture faithfulness. Yet we cannot necessarily equate the fruitfulness with the impact that our lives have on others. The biblical texts do not allow this limitation, as a survey will reveal.

Talents

As to the parable of the talents, it should not automatically be assumed that the increase in talents represents an evangelistic impact in terms of producing converts. Indeed, soteriological converts is not the focus. As surmised in my book, *The Outer Darkness*, the talents represent the abilities and corresponding responsibilities that believers have been given in order to serve the Lord, particularly in view of the *mysteries of the kingdom* they have been granted. The resumption of Mt 13:12 in Mt 25:29 (cp. Mt 13:11; 10:27) strongly suggests this association:

¹¹ And He answered and said to them, “To you it has been granted to **know the mysteries of the kingdom** of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. ¹² **For whoever has, to him shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.**” (Mt 13:11-12)

²⁸ “Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents. ²⁹ **For to everyone who has shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away.** ³⁰ And cast out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt 25:28-30).

Scholars such as France and Chenoweth support this contention. *Knowledge of the mystery of the kingdom* encompasses far more than merely perceiving that the kingdom is delayed. The privilege and responsibility of knowing the kingdom message has been entrusted to the church, even now, and is to be shared during the church age. Increasing one’s talent in terms of growing in kingdom maturity, both in terms of one’s understanding of the kingdom and living in accord with that understanding, is not put on hold until the tribulation. Judging from this comparison, increasing one’s knowledge of the kingdom certainly appears to be the rewardable trait principally in view. This induction finds collaboration in the context of the first passage quoted above: “And He said to them, ‘Therefore every scribe who has become a *disciple of the kingdom of heaven* is like a head of a household, who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old’” (Mt 13:52). A disciple of the kingdom’s treasure is linked with his ability to integrate old and new insights regarding the kingdom. My book, *The Outer Darkness*, excels in that aspect. Thus, even though I might be disappointed in terms of the impact that this magnum opus is having on Christendom at large, I would be a fool to wallow in self-pity. My own research would lead me to conclude that my work is not in vain but represents a considerable treasure, both now and in the future. In the parable of the soils, the good soil produces mature fruit, even to a 100 fold increase (Lk 8:14-15; cp. Mt 13:23). Yet I do not have to have 100 people read my books in order for me to conclude that I might have accomplished that 100 fold increase. In terms of kingdom knowledge, I believe that my books accomplish that level of fruitfulness, even if no one were to read them.⁵

A mature kingdom understanding enables me to keep writing books even when I know that they will achieve very little in terms of circulation. I keep reminding myself that even if Jesus were the only one to read some of the books I am writing, it would still be worth it. And if He comes as early as I hope, this certainly will prove to be the case. He is the

⁵ Along with praying for believers to be fruitful in good works, Paul prays that they increase in knowledge (Col 1:10). Daniel was promised, “Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven” (Dan 12:3). Fruitfulness in knowledge is one of the virtues extolled by Peter as a means to a rich entrance into the kingdom (2Pet 1:5-11).

only one who will have read a number of my books that I have been working on over the years that are still in rough draft format. Should I consider that work in vain or unfruitful because it has zero impact on others? Far from it! In fact, my greater rewards might come from being faithful in those cases where my work will have little to no impact on others. Fruitfulness could well be abundant in the case of secret faithfulness. Jesus certainly promises high reward to those who secretly serve Him (Mt 6:1-6). Those servants who are considered least now could be considered great then. Teaching kingdom truths correctly carries high misthological benefits, conversely teaching it incorrectly can have very grave misthological implications (cp. Mt 5:19; Jam 3:1).

One simply cannot limit rewards and pleasing the Lord to producing evangelistic fruit. Even in a book that is dedicated to motivating us to witness and which emphasizes rewards as a proper incentive to do so, Lovett stresses time and again that the primary criteria is faithfulness regarding our money, time, and talents (p. 24). “He has entrusted each of us with time, ability, and a job which fits us to a tee. He expects us to be faithful” (p. 34). As to “the parable of the talents,” Lovett explains,

In this the Lord showed that able Christians have **DIFFERENT OPPORTUNITIES** in this life, it is a matter of how faithful each is in his **own** stewardship that counts. One’s gifts and abilities have nothing to do with another’s capacity to earn the **SAME** reward. A housewife who is faithful to her call, for example, can end up with as much treasure as Billy Graham or Charles E. Fuller. She is **NOT** competing against people occupying a different role (Matt. 15:14-30).⁶ (Emphasis his.)

Obviously, a housewife is not going to be anywhere nearly as fruitful numerically as the world’s most popular evangelists, yet Lovett is emphatic that she can get the same reward: “**FAITHFULNESS** to the task—even though abilities and opportunities differ—brings exactly the **same reward**” (emphasis his, 103). “Who gets the high positions? Who will be the greats of eternity? The nobodies of this world. Those who have made no reputations for themselves, forsaking all to crown Jesus their absolute Master. Humble housewives who have submitted to harsh husbands as unto the Lord” (p. 58).

Types of Rewards

Think about it. Faithfulness, not numeric fruitfulness, must be the criteria in many reward passages. In Col 3:19, for example, Paul writes to Christian wives telling them to be submissive to their husbands. Then he proceeds to tell Christian slaves to be submissive to their masters, promising them that they will inherit the kingdom as a result:

²² Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. (Col 3:22-23)

Is a lowly slave going to produce any significant numeric results compared to a traveling evangelist like Paul? Of course not! Yet Paul assures slaves that they can inherit the kingdom, if they are faithful. His statement and this assessment are in complete harmony with what Paul said earlier in this same epistle to the entire congregation.

²² He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and **blameless and beyond reproach**—²³ **if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast**, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister. (Col 1:22-23)

Faithfulness, not evangelistic fruitfulness, is what is necessary for being misthologically blameless. Similarly, even in the very context of 1Thess 2:19-20, which is the famous passage regarding the soul-winner’s crown, where Paul is concerned that his own reward might be diminished if his converts are not faithful (see ch. 3, esp. 3:5,8; cp. 2Jn 1:8; 2Cor 11:2-3), Paul nevertheless assures his converts that they can be blameless if they will abound in love:

¹¹ Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; ¹² and may the Lord cause you to increase and **abound in love** for one another, and for all men, just as we also do for you; ¹³ **so that He may establish your hearts unblamable** in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints. (1Thess 3:11-13)

⁶ C. S. Lovett, *Jesus is Coming—Get Ready Christian!* (Baldwin Park, CA: Personal Christianity, 1969), 44.

Paul would not be found blameless if he were not evangelistically and numerically fruitful (at the very least his reward would be diminished), but his converts could be faultless if they were just personally faithful! Why the double standard? Because they were gifted with different abilities and opportunities, just as Lovett correctly surmised above. At the end of his book (p. 121), Lovett provides the typical list of the five types of crowns that believers may earn/win if they are faithful. A quick Google search would bring up information on these crowns:

1. The imperishable crown for those who discipline their bodies in self-control (1Cor 9:24-27).
2. The crown of righteousness for those who look forward to Jesus' appearing (2Tim 4:8).
3. The crown of life for those who lovingly endure trials till death (Jam 1:5; Rev 2:10).
4. The crown of rejoicing for soul-winners (Phil 4:1; 1Thess 2:19-20; cp. Prov 11:30; Dan 12:3).
5. The crown of glory for faithful leaders (1Pet 5:4; cp. Mt 5:19; Jam 3:1).

The first three crowns should probably be winnable by all faithful believers since these crowns are not conditioned on one having a special gift or a certain office. Crown number four might only be attainable by those believers who are gifted in evangelism or who are in advantageous positions or locations that are conducive to evangelism or discipleship. The fifth crown would be limited to those in leadership positions within the church. Obviously, you have to be a leader to get a leadership crown. If you are not in a position of leadership, you cannot qualify for this particular crown, at least not directly. But Jesus does promise that those who support a prophet will get a prophet's reward (Mt 10:41). The same promise would apply to those who support evangelists and other church leaders. So all of us should be able to participate, at various levels, either directly or indirectly, in each of these crowns.

Even the most faithful and numerically fruitful, can have their crowns tarnished, however. Paul and John were concerned that their own soul-winner's crown would be tarnished if their converts did not prove faithful (2Cor 11:2-3; 1Thess 2:19-3:8; 2Jn 1:8). Considering the degree of abandonment Paul experienced at the end of his ministry on the part of those to whom he had ministered, we must conclude that even his crown was diminished to some degree at the end (2Tim 1:15; 4:10,16). Nonetheless, in the midst of this desertion on the part of those who should have stood by him, Paul was 100% certain that the Lord was pleased with Him because of his personal performance (2Tim 4:7-8). We cannot control how others respond to our ministry; nevertheless, we can be confident that the Lord will be pleased with our ministry, if we have proven faithful.

Types of Fruit

John the Baptist commenced his call in regard to the coming kingdom with a demand to bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance (Mt 3:8-10; Lk 3:8-9). The impact he demanded was that his message would have an impact on your own life. Fruit was not equated with the impact your life has on others in changing them but on the impact his message had on you and changing how you treat others. Paul would likewise affirm that the fruit of the Spirit is measured in terms of the impact the Spirit has on your own personal character (Gal 5:22-26). When Mt 7:17-20 is interpreted misthologically, the fruit apparently refers to both words and works, a good showing in both areas being necessary to inherit the kingdom. Ditto in Mt 12:33-37. Misthological justification is conditioned on good teaching. Yes, Jesus expects us to bear much fruit, and so prove to be His disciples (Jn 15:1-8). Yet, in the context, the principle fruit in view is love for one another (Jn 13:35; 15:9-17). Living righteously would be bearing fruit for God (Rom 7:4; Phil 1:9-11; Heb 12:11; Jam 3:18). Letting your light shine in producing good works and living righteously and learning and practicing the truth is a way to be fruitful (Eph 5:9-10; Col 1:10; cp. Mt 5:16). Praising God by giving thanks is considered producing fruit (Heb 13:15). Given these various forms of fruitfulness, one cannot equate fruitfulness with successful impact on others.

Blessing on Character

The focus of our pastor's sermon that Sunday morning was on the first two Beatitudes from Mt 5:3-4. In the Beatitudes as a whole, Jesus is promising great reward in heaven for those believers who persevere in developing and displaying these character traits. The focus of the blessing is not conditioned on the successful impact these traits have on others. To the contrary, Jesus concludes by saying, "Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Mt 5:11-12). This great reward is not promised for being fruitful in terms of having a successful, positive impact on others. Otherwise, rewards would be conditioned on being popular rather than being persecuted. Far to the contrary! Faithfulness when being unfruitful in terms of positive impact is exalted. The prophets are noted for being persecuted, not for being successful. This assessment is in harmony with the spirit of the passage. Jesus does not say, "Blessed are the successful," but, "Blessed are the merciful" (Mt 5:7).

The first two Beatitudes do not focus on either the positive or negative impact our lives have on others but on our own attitudes: being poor in spirit and mourning over sin. Being poor in spirit does not come easily for the successful, but it comes naturally for the unsuccessful, for those who have little in the way of power or prestige. Our pastor

emphasized that we should mourn over sin in our lives and society. Indeed, should we not be groaning within ourselves in our desire to be rid of sin (Rom 8:18-23)? The reader who wrote this letter to me, asking that somehow he could bear fruit that would result in the Lord being pleased with him, failed to realize that his letter was dripping wet with both of these Beatitude virtues, thereby providing ample proof that the Lord already was pleased with him. Additionally, in expressing a hungering and thirsting for righteousness within his letter, the reader was unknowingly manifesting the spirit of the fourth Beatitude (Mt 5:6). Appropriately, my prayer for the reader was not that somehow the Lord might become pleased with the reader but that somehow the reader might become persuaded that the Beatitudes were true and, therefore, that the Lord already was pleased with the reader's spirit.

But what if there are some sins we struggle with overcoming, does this not prove that we are not overcomers and therefore not entitled to such rewards? Not necessarily. In Dillow's closing chapter that I finished that Saturday night, he had these very encouraging words:

Some of us come from broken homes, alcoholic homes, or some of us have certain genetic predispositions to stress, anxiety, and other emotional difficulties that often make trusting God more difficult than for others. While Scripture never allows us to use these things as an excuse for disobedience, our great High Priest knows about these things and takes them into account now and surely will at the final reckoning. At that time many who are first will be last, and the last will be first. **Just because someone struggles with persistent failure now does not mean he forfeits his reward; in fact it means just the opposite. The fact that he stays in the struggle and returns to the battle is evident proof that he is one of the Partners.** Remember, David committed adultery and murder, and yet at the end of his life God said of him that he was a "man after God's own heart." **Success is not the only issue; faithful perseverance, even after failure, is!**⁷

That said, neither Dillow nor I believe that mature, overcoming Christians live in the defeat described by Rom 7. Mature believers should be experiencing God's victorious power as described by Rom 8 (see Dillow's Ch. 46, for example). Nevertheless, I find myself in substantial agreement with these closing remarks by Dillow, particularly when understood within the context of his earlier comments leading up to this conclusion:

Therefore no Christian who is pursuing God need worry about the failures and confessed sins that occur in his life resulting in rebuke at the Judgment Seat of Christ. He should anticipate meeting a compassionate Father and a merciful high priest who understands the struggle, who Himself participated in it. We should anticipate the Judgment Seat of Christ with joy, not fear. Only those who persist in carnality and who refuse to repent and confess need view the coming judgment with a sense of dread.⁸

And even earlier, after citing several passages promising rewards to the faithful, Dillow provides this excellent advice:

A faithful man is of high value to God. Solomon asks, "Who can find a faithful man" (Proverbs 20:6). **In the final analysis this will be the "bottom line." God will not judge us on the basis of our success but on the basis of our faithfulness. This is an excellent approach to mental health. We cannot all be successful, but we all can be faithful.**

Here is a man who struggles with emotional problems that were either chemically or environmentally induced. His struggle against sin in certain areas may never be as successful as the struggle in that area that another man has. But God knows the heart. He looks at faithfulness and not only victory. Thus, even though he was less successful, it is conceivable that he will be more highly rewarded. There will be many reversals in heaven. The first will be last, and those seemingly destined for high honor will be distant from the throne. Those unknown to history, who were perhaps insignificant in this life but who were faithful servants, will reign with the servant kings in the coming kingdom.⁹

Friday

Friday, the day before I received this letter from this reader, I was reading a commentary on Revelation by Hamblin. Like Dillow, he had stated, "Spiritually mature Christians continually strive to overcome sin while carnal

⁷ Dillow, *Destiny*, 1011-1012.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 930.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 758.

Christians lead lives virtually indistinguishable from the unsaved.”¹⁰ Revelation chs. 2-3 are focused on what is necessary to please the Lord; faithfulness is key: “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev 2:10; cp. 2:13). Faithfulness does not necessarily result in numeric fruitfulness; it may result in persecution and death instead. Nevertheless, this unfruitful faithfulness pleases the Lord and results in reward.

Additionally, Hamblin notes that we are in the lukewarm Laodicean age, which Jesus said would be like the days of Noah and Lot in respect to the flood and Sodom, respectively (Mt 24:37-39; Lk 17:26-29), leading Hamblin to point out:

The combination of Noah and Sodom presents a troubling picture of humanity on the eve of Jesus’ return. It is one of complete debauchery but is consistent with other detailed descriptions of last days’ people. Another less obvious part of the prophecy deals with the righteous during this time. For both Noah and Lot, their testimonies produced little fruit, as only eight souls survived the flood and only three survived Sodom’s destruction. In Lot’s case, he chose to live in Sodom, and the decision vexed his soul (2 Peter 2:6-8), causing him to lose his testimony even among his own family.

Should we conclude that the Lord was no more pleased with Noah than He was with Lot since neither produced significant numeric fruit? Hardly! Significantly, the typological correlation would indicate that, as a rule, both the spiritual and the carnal will bear little numeric fruit in the closing days of the church. Citing 2Thess 2:3-4 in support (p. 170), Hamblin concludes that the Laodicean age will be one in which apostasy increases. Research would seem to concur. Shortly before I received this letter from the reader, I learned that Barna Survey results show that only 19% of those people who consider themselves born again hold a biblical world view which, among other things, affirms that we do not earn our way into Heaven by doing good works, though the statistics regarding the latter are better since about half (i.e., 47%) strongly reject any notion of earning salvation.¹¹ However, I suspect that this figure is highly inflated in that many professing Christians who reject the notion of “earning salvation” still believe that good works are somehow necessary in order to enter Heaven. The survey may only have addressed Neonomianism and failed to discern other legalistic soteriological breakdowns in Christendom, typically found in both Calvinism and Arminianism.

For example, the Barna Group claims that Jehovah’s Witnesses “are significantly more likely than born again adults to reject the notion of salvation earned through good works.”¹² Nonsense! To date, every Jehovah’s Witness I have talked with has assumed that good works are necessary to enter Heaven. Like most so-called, born-again Christians, JW’s cite Mt 7:21-23 and Jam 2:14 and erroneously think that this proves their case. *The Kingdom of the Cults* by Martin (p. 54) documents that JW literature conditions salvation on performance and perseverance. Barna should have asked those Jehovah’s Witnesses who supposedly denied that salvation is earned a follow-up question, namely, “Are good works in some way necessary to enter Heaven?” Then, if any JW’s responded correctly by answering negatively, Barna should have asked them to explain Mt 7:20-23 and Jam 2:14. Frankly, I would be surprised if Barna could find even one Jehovah’s Witness who could be consistent in maintaining their allusion to believe in salvation by faith apart from works if they were asked such basic diagnostic questions. Since Barna has grossly overestimated the number of Jehovah’s Witnesses who genuinely affirm salvation by faith apart from works, it stands to reason that Barna has erroneously overestimated the number of people at large who consider themselves born-again who would actually pass the same questions.

Proper understanding at this fundamental level is a soteriological necessity (e.g., Rom 3:28). Yet we may deduce from Scripture that most professing believers would flunk such a rudimentary questionnaire if properly administered. For instance, the passage regarding the narrow gate versus the broad gate (Mt 7:13-14) kick starts the discussion leading to the infamous know-them-by-their-fruit pericope (Mt 7:15-20), followed by the depart-from-Me passage in Mt 7:21-23. The impression from this series of passages is that the vast majority of professing believers are going to fail to enter the kingdom soteriologically. Judging from personal experience, church history, and present surveys, such as Barna, an estimate of 10% seems reasonable. The number of genuinely correct results are certainly the minority. Using this rather reasonable estimate for the minority who respond correctly, only 10% of professing believers through the history of the church would be genuine believers. Such a small percentage would explain why Jesus says that most of those entering do so by a broad gate that leads to destruction. Moreover, of this 10% who pass the soteriological diagnostic questions,

¹⁰ David A. Hamblin, *Unveiling the Mysteries of the Last Days: Systematic Prophecy from Genesis to Revelation* (Mustang, OK: Tate Publishing & Enterprises, 2010), 33.

¹¹ *Barna Survey Examines Changes in Worldview Among Christians over the Past 13 Years*. Available at: <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/21-transformation/252>. Accessed on 6-25-2015.

¹² *Who’s That Knocking on the Door? Research Examines the Faith of Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses*. Available at: <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/faith-spirituality/38>. Accessed on 6-25-2015.

possibly only 10% of those will enter the kingdom misthologically. At the broad level, if Rev 2-3 represents the church age, then the majority of believers are doing poorly in preparing for the Bema (cp. Mt 22:14; 2Pet 1:10-11). More specifically, this statistically summation of 10% is suggested by the ten lepers, where only one out of ten is commended for his faith (Lk 17:12-19). The number 10 signifies completion, and the passage quite possibly signifies that only one in ten have a faith that is commendable—both soteriologically and subsequently misthologically. Only the remnant will be saved (cp. Rom 9:27; 11:5). The lump has been leavened with bad teaching, resulting in monstrous growth housing the birds of the air (Mt 13:31-33). If this estimate of 10% is correct, then 90% of the church is composed of evil birds and sinful leaven.

A natural corollary of such passages is that those bearing the most fruit numerically will, as a general rule, be bearing bad fruit soteriologically and misthologically. Bad teachers and bad teaching will be the rule of the day, not the exception. Therefore, the majority of the fruit produced will be bad. People will turn from sound teachers and flock to popular teachers, just as some did with Paul, in order to have their ears tickled (2Tim 4:3-4; cp. 1:15; 2:17-18; 4:10,16; Gal 4:16; 5:4). Soterically, the most successful teachers and preachers, in terms of numeric converts, will be producing false converts. They and their converts will be in the soteric 90% percentile and thrown into the Lake of Fire at the Great White throne judgment. Misthologically, the most popular teachers and preachers will be producing results that lack the quality necessary to survive the Bema. They and their disciples will be in the mistholic 90% percentile thrown into the outer darkness. Quality counts a whole lot more than quantity in such cases. Quite possibly, the Lord is pleased with only 10% of 10% of those in professing Christendom. Thus, only 1% would make the misthological cut. A little gold is better than a lot of wood when the results are subjected to a fiery judgment (1Cor 3:11-15).

I have every reason to expect that those who are accurately dividing the word of truth soteriologically and misthologically and trying to live accordingly by the power of the Holy Spirit will comprise that 1%. Therefore, although 1% is a very small percentage, the probability approaches certainty that the reader who sent me this letter, just wishing that “somehow, someday” the Lord will be pleased, will find that he is well within that 1% percentile. He only needs to be faithful and believe that the Lord will reward his seeking to be pleasing to the Lord (Heb 11:6)! My prayer, then, is that my response herein will strengthen him and others like him in their faith. Such faith can energize us to be faithful. Doubt discourages. It is much easier to be faithful when you believe that your faithfulness is not in vain. “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord” (1Cor 15:58).

Conclusion

False prophets and teachers have always been popular. Their apparent success is a large part of their deception. Big numbers can point to pervasive deception, however. Do not be deceived by their success and growth! Jesus said that bad trees will produce bad fruit and that the majority would fall into this category, and this production of rotten fruit will be the rule of the day as the church age closes. Logically, the majority of the fruit being produced today must be bad. Producing a little good fruit is infinitely better than producing a lot of bad fruit. For good trees to be discouraged and depressed because they are not producing as much numeric fruit as bad trees would be extremely shortsighted. We are to live by faith, not by sight. And faith would conclude that faithfulness in the soteriological and misthological spectrums will result in hearing, “Well done,” even if the numeric fruitfulness one might have hoped to achieve is not present.