

What Counts With God

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Every true believer knows he cannot earn his salvation. It is the ultimate love gift from God brought about by the miraculous birth, sinless life, sacrificial death and bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).* Offered to all, those who receive that gift by trusting Jesus are saved from sin judgment and will spend eternity in His presence.

Most of us do not go immediately to Heaven after we are saved (although the believing thief on the cross did). While we are waiting for that day, we can show our gratitude to our heavenly Father by loving Him and loving others. Love is the measurement by which God judges our hearts and our activities. *We love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).* Jesus, asked which was the first commandment of all, answered, *"The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."* (Mark 12:28-31).

What We Do Must Be on the Foundation Laid by Jesus

Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire (1 Corinthians 3:8-15).

Although God does His work through us, He carefully judges our attitude while we are working. The starting place of any work that will last for eternity is with Jesus. Any thing worth working for is founded on Him - trusting Him, conforming to His image and willingly doing whatever He asks. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus likens those who hear Him and do what He asks to a wise man who built his house on the rock. He also said that those who are persecuted on His behalf should rejoice for their reward is great.

Jim Elliott (one of five missionaries killed in 1956 while attempting to evangelize a tribe in Ecuador) wrote, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.... I seek not a long life, but a full one, like you Lord Jesus." Jim was 29 when he was killed. Since that time, because of the forgiveness and the witness of his wife and others, many in that tribe became believers.

What is Done in Love Identifies a True Believer

Jesus was the supreme example of how to act in love. He was the sinless Son of God and yet, because of His love for us, He chose to become our brother and show us how to lovingly obey our Heavenly Father.

There are those who claim to be believers, do "good" works, and yet are not acting in the love of Christ Jesus. They will be surprised when their deeds are described as lawlessness by Jesus.

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:21-23).

The Shepherd/King will one day separate His sheep from the goats. To the sheep, He will say, *"Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry, and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me."* The righteous will answer, "When did we do those things?" Jesus' answer is that whenever you do these things to the least of His brethren, you do it to Him. The righteous are surprised because what they did came naturally - through the Spirit of Jesus living within them, they acted in love toward their fellow man. *God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him (1 John 4:16).*

On the other hand, the goats - on His left - will be told, *'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'* He then proceeded to remind them that they did NOT do anything for Him. Equally surprised, the goats asked the Lord when was it that they saw Him hungry, thirsty, as a stranger, naked, sick or in prison. His answer was, *"inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me"* (Matthew 25:31-46).

What is Done in Love will Count

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

As God's fellow workers, our work will be tested. It's not so much what we do that counts - it's why we do it. Those who love Jesus, such as the sheep at judgment day, didn't realize what they had done was going to be commended by the Lord. They just loved Him and showed that love to others.

Every action Jesus took was because He loved the Father and His followers. His actions resulted in bringing glory to the Father and salvation to His brothers.

As believers, we will be judged by the principle of love. *Let all that you do be done with love (1 Corinthians 16:14).*

What counts with God? Love, founded in the person of Jesus, and acted out through faith in Him.

I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God's love, and to know the Messiah's love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:17-19).