

350 A Two-Fold Accountability

Those of us seeking to be “Christ’s faithful sheep” are well aware of our being accountable to Christ the Good Shepherd for how we live our lives, and this awareness helps to guide us in our conduct.

But we are also given in God’s Word a second form of accountability for us to keep in mind – namely, what impression our lives are making upon the people around us. This secondary accountability can be overdone, with our Christian conduct becoming wrongly dominated by our desire to be popular and accepted. Or it can be underdone, with an arrogance on our part along the lines of, “I’ll do what I like under the Lord as I see fit, and if people don’t like it then that’s their problem!”.

So in our Christian discipleship we have this two-fold accountability, not only to the Lord, but also to one another. From the scriptural examples that follow we gain a good understanding of what this is to mean for us in practice.

In Genesis 6.8-9, we read that Noah “found grace in the eyes of the Lord ... (he) was a just man and perfect in his generations, [and] Noah walked with God”. Noah lived in times of “great wickedness in the earth” (from 6.5) – even worse than today we must assume – but anyone around him “with eyes to see” would have seen this man’s basic goodness, especially as he and his family patiently built that huge ark.

Many years later, when Moses was faced with too many demands on him, he said to the people, “Take you wise men, and understanding, and known among your tribes ...” (Deuteronomy 1.13, KJV); that is, the men to be chosen as leaders were those who had already gained respect from those among whom they lived.

At the start of Luke’s Gospel, we read that Zachariah and Elisabeth, before they were blessed with the birth of their son John, “were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Luke 1.6): God saw the reality of their lives, and so did others around them.

We have the same principle in action in Acts 6.3 when the need for deacons arose – “... look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom”. Again, a man being considered for appointment as an “episkopos” - “must have a good report of them who are without” (I Timothy 3.7), a phrase which refers to the people among

whom this man already lived and worked. Such people bore no allegiance to Christ themselves, but they could see that this potential bearer of a high office in the Christian community was a decent man.

The Lord Himself, referring to the recognition of false prophets but with general application too, tells us, “Ye shall know them by their fruits” (from Matthew 7.16 & 20) – we can see the true nature of a person’s life from the “fruits” that that life produces. (Interestingly, and quite apart from their political allegiances, in Britain we have a vivid range of such “fruits” among our current political leaders, notably in the contrast between the lives of Theresa May and Boris Johnson for example).

Later we read, “we are his (God’s) workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works” (from Ephesians 2.10); and, “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone” (James 2.17). The message here is clear – the profession of Christian faith will lead inevitably to “good works” that are bound to be visible to others, and if no such “good works” are apparent, then something is wrong somewhere!

Furthermore, “Abstain from all appearance of evil” (I Thessalonians 5.22) – be conscious of how people will view our conduct. Concerning the widows genuinely eligible for financial support from the local “ekklesia”, these women are to be “well reported for good works”, while younger widows are to “give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully” (I Timothy 5.10a & 14b).

Each of these references addressing their various situations drives home the same simple point – the need that each of us has to keep an eye on how our lives are regarded, not just by the Lord Himself, but by others too. How are each of us doing on this? We don’t set out for our good deeds to be seen – that was the mistake of many of the Pharisees – but rather that we may be found faithful and obedient before the Lord (eg., Matthew 5.14-16 and 6.1-4,6,17-18).

We can finish this time with mention of that “good work” of sanctification being done by God our Father on our behalf – “he who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (from Philippians 1.6).

So underlying our God-given, two-fold accountability is our constant hymn of praise to Almighty God for the abundance of His “good works” in Christ. A noisy rendering of Psalm 150 is ideal, but we might just warn the neighbours before we start ...

