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Discussion

1. At your funeral, what accomplishments would you hope to see mentioned?
2. Are there any accomplishments that you are especially pleased about?
3. Are there some that you feel are meaningless?



OUR FILTHY RAGS

Isaiah 64:5-7

5 You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways.
But when we continued to sin against them, you were angry.
How then can we be saved?
6 All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like **filthy rags**; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

Zechariah 3:1-4

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him.
2 The Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?"
3 Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel.
4 The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes."
Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put fine garments on you."

Isaiah 61:10
I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God.
For he has clothed me with garments of salvation
and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness,
as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

Matthew 22:8-14
8 “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not
deserve to come.
9 So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’
10 So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the
bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.
11 “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not
wearing wedding clothes. 12 He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes,
friend?’ The man was speechless.
13 “Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into
the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’
14 “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

Revelation 3:4-5
4 Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.
5 The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels.

Revelation 3:15-18
15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.
17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.
18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

1. Generosity mixed with desire for recognition
2. Obedience mixed with resentment
3. Religious devotion mixed with pride
4. Charity mixed with self-righteousness

Good works:

God commands them.

God takes pleasure in obedience.

They are evidence of transformed life.

They will be evaluated by God.

But they cannot:

Purchase forgiveness,

Cancel guilt,

Obligate God to save us,

Establish a righteousness sufficient for justification,

Give us grounds for boasting before God.

Two Opposite Errors

Error #1: Moralism

"If I am good enough, God will accept me."

This contradicts the biblical teaching of grace.

Error #2: Antinomianism

"Since works don't save me, works don't matter."

This contradicts the equally biblical teaching that those who belong to Christ are created for good works.

The Biblical Position:

Grace is the source.

Faith is the means of receiving it.

Christ is the ground of salvation.

Good works are the fruit.

God gets the glory.

DISCUSSION

1. When you've done something good for others, or for the church, describe your feelings of satisfaction.
2. Do you find it easy…or difficult… to separate your motivations for doing good works?
3. Is the desire to be affirmed for doing good proof that your motives are corrupt?
4. Is it even possible to completely do something good simply to please God?
5. How can we keep our efforts to do good in proper perspective
    a. For ourselves
    b. For others

PRACTICAL WAYS TO KEEP THINGS IN THEIR PROPER PLACE

1. Identity
2. Offering
3. Recognition
4. Cultivation
5. Release
6. Discipline
7. Foundation
8. Faithfulness
9. Gratitude

IDENTITY

Start with identity, not performance

The Christian's first question shouldn't be:

"Am I doing enough good?"

It should be:

"Who am I in Christ?"

Your good works aren't auditions for acceptance.

Or…you are the hands of Christ in this world.

OFFERING

A short prayer before acting:

“Lord, this is yours. Let me do this for the good of this person and for your glory. I don't need anything from this except faithfulness.”

Not:

“I'll do this, and then I hope people notice.”

OR

“I'll do this so I can feel like a good Christian.”

BUT

“God has given me the opportunity and ability to do this. I offer it back to him.”

“Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” 1 Corinthians 10:31

RECOGNITION

Be aware of when “Glory to God” becomes “Glory to Me”:

“Yes, and wasn't I particularly impressive in how God used me?”

Verses

“If nobody ever knew I did this, I’d still be glad that I did it”

CULTIVATION

Cultivate Hidden Good Works.

Not every good work must be hidden:

"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father." Matthew 5:16

But occasionally it is genuinely good to perform works nobody but God knows about:

Give anonymously.

Clean something nobody notices.

Pray for someone without telling them.

Do a task that somebody else will receive credit for.

Serve someone who cannot repay you.

And then don't tell anybody.

RELEASE

Release the desire to possess self-righteousness

"Lord, if the work accomplished good, that's what matters. I don't need ownership of the praise."

Release things like:

my ministry

my sacrifice

my generosity

my discipleship

my accomplishments

"What do you have that you did not receive?"

1 Corinthians 4:7

DISCIPLINE

It is particularly dangerous for Christians to turn their spiritual disciplines into a spiritual resume.

Don't make your obedience your righteousness

You can simultaneously say:

"I want to become more holy." and "My holiness is not my savior."

Though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ

Philippians 3:4-7

FOUNDATION

As a flip side to the above,

If good works become evidence that you're worthy of salvation

then

bad works inevitably become evidence that you're unworthy of salvation.

This puts you on an emotional roller-coaster

"I had a great devotional time today. I'm doing well with God."

Then:

"I blew it today. Maybe I'm not really a Christian."

My standing with God rests on Christ.

My obedience matters enormously, but it isn't the foundation of my standing.

FAITHFULNESS

Make “faithfulness” your goal rather than “success.”

We crave applause if we desire success.

Faithfulness desires no such thing.

In Matthew 25, Jesus tells in the parable of the talents:

“Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Not:

“Well done, extraordinarily impressive servant.”

The results belong to God.

Your responsibility is faithfulness

GRATITUDE

Gratitude is an antidote to boasting

When tempted to pride, trace the accomplishment backward until you find something you received

"I served someone."

→ Who gave me the opportunity?

"I gave generously."

→ Who gave me the resources?

"I understood Scripture."

→ Who gave me the mind and teachers and circumstances through which I learned?

What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

1 Corinthians 4:7

The wonderful paradox:

The more securely a Christian understands that he cannot earn God's love,

the freer he becomes to do good in pure response to God’s love

and not as an act to achieve God’s love.