

It never ceases to amaze me how little that many Christians seem to try to measure their true effectiveness for Christ! Now, to be sure, many Christians do measure how good they feel about themselves, which can alternately result in pangs of guilt or a certain measure of self-satisfaction. But the real question should be and ultimately is this: "how does Jesus measure the Christian's works?"

Let's back up a minute. All *unbelievers* will be assessed by God at the Great White Throne judgment. It's there that they will reap what they deserve from the sins they have sown. In contrast, *believers* will appear before Christ at the Judgment Seat of Christ, where each will get rewards for the works they've built on the foundation of Christ. At the same time, all the remainder of their works will be mercifully burned. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul instructs us about this in 1 Corinthians 3:9-14.

To be perfectly clear, the Bible teaches that we cannot possibly get to heaven by our good works like so many religionists would like us to believe. No, each person can only respond in faith to the amazing grace freely bestowed by Christ via the Cross. That's in Ephesians 2:8. So, once each of us is indeed a believer through His grace, God is recording all of our works for the unfolding of the joyous event for each of us that's known as the Judgment Seat of Christ. That will encompass the rewarding of what we have built on the foundation of Christ...and the merciful burning of what we haven't. *That* is awesome and amazing!

By the way, in my experience, there can be a bit of a snooty response that some Christians assign to this truth, like it's somehow inappropriate or even dirty to be working for rewards from God. After all, the thinking goes, shouldn't we be doing works for God out of sheer gratitude—without an unseemly awareness of possible rewards? But if it's true, that it's just all about gratitude alone, why does God's Word so clearly state that all of our works as believers will be judged for rewards?

So, every action we take in life matters...for ultimate rewarding or burning! Well, now, that brings real clarity and focus. But according to 1 Corinthians 3 the key question is this: in order to be duly rewarded, are we truly building on the foundation of Christ? Asking this is not a guilt trip. Rather, this is to clearly understand the very framework God has given us in order to optimize our position in the Kingdom. That's like understanding the rules of soccer or basketball or Scrabble® before you start in order to know how you'll be rewarded at the end of the game.

Now, let's talk for a minute about the foundation of Christ that Paul called out to the Corinthians. You see, Jesus' death on the Cross covered it all—that's the finished work of the Cross unto salvation. But God also specifically invites His children to partner with Him in proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom of God! Here's how the Apostle Paul said it in Romans 10:13-15 (ESV): "For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!'"

Wow, God wants us to be very effective in the opportunities of each of us working according to His purposes: going forth, proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, making disciples of all nations! What a privilege that is, a privilege that He didn't have to give us to exercise at all!

But then here's the question: how does God measure what we're building as believers?

Well, let's take a quick look at a very interesting development that likely can help us gain a proper mindset—after all, God tells us in Romans 12:2 to seek after the renewal of our minds. What development, you say? Well, it's probably one of the most interesting statistics ever developed for team sports—the "net rating" used by astute coaches and data nerds in the U.S. National Basketball Association, the NBA.

Do you know Alex Caruso, that amazing NBA player with the Los Angeles Lakers? Well, it's pretty likely that you've never heard of him. But here's the story: the superstar LeBron James is often named in the current era as likely the best player in the NBA...and the person that makes the entire team most productive—by far—when LeBron James is in the game is none other than Alex Caruso!

This basketball assessment is known as the "net rating," which calculates a team's point differential per 100 possessions of the ball. And the person being assessed must have what is determined to be enough playing time with the team configuration to be statistically valid enough to be assessed and compared to others. And our relatively unknown player, Alex Caruso, has earned a rating of 18.6 when playing with LeBron James, far eclipsing famous past and present teammates of LeBron like Dwayne Wade, Chris Bosch, Kevin Love, Kyrie Irving, and Anthony Davis. Of course, this shows that Caruso is very valuable to the team.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported Caruso saying this, "I've always done a good job when I play with better players than myself. I seem to be able to raise my game. I can't always do that if I'm the best player on the court. Luckily, I'm not going to be the best player on the court probably for the rest of my life." Yes, Caruso—with the team's goals in mind and with humility—raises his game when playing alongside superior players.

I love that. Caruso reveals here that he rightly knows he has NBA-level competencies—after all, he worked years in lesser leagues to get there. But he still ladles heaping helpings of personal humility on top of that competency, acknowledging the clear superiority of the others he's supporting in his team's endeavors.

Simply put, this is a compelling example for every Christian. Jesus perfectly fulfilled His destiny with the finished work of the Cross, and then He asks us measly little believers to be on the team to help bring others into the Kingdom. Wow! ...But are you truly even trying to be effective and fruitful for the team?

Think of the very first part of the book of Acts and the birth of the Church, with Peter—under the power of the Holy Spirit—giving the Church's first message during the Jews' gathering of Pentecost. He clearly and succinctly points to the events of the moment, the eternal work of Christ, and its meaning to the hearers. And, here's a real key—God measured the results: three thousand were added right then! You see, God is a metrics-oriented God! And, soon after, the Bible records that thousands more were added!

You see, Peter had a fantastic "net rating"—for that initial event, at least. After all, Peter stumbled later, for example, when he was associating only with Jews and was confronted about that by Paul. That was *not* a good day for Peter's net rating—probably, sadly, kindling for burning at the Judgment Seat.

So, how many disciples are you and your church adding this month...this year? Does your church publish a regular report of your "net rating" of making new disciples, or just a regular annual financial statement like a Fortune 500 company? I'm routinely stunned by sincere Christians who've taken expensive mission trips and cannot point to even one life as having been truly transformed by Jesus! Now, there can be and *are* difficult mission fields, for sure. But *never expecting new disciples* from a mission trip—or our everyday lives—effectively pulls the believer off-course from God's call to make disciples.

And wait just a minute! You're not partnering with the amazing LeBron James—no, you are partnering with the infinitely more amazing Jesus Christ, the all-time MVP who's invited you on to His team. And, as we have clearly seen, Jesus wants you to be rewarded for your works—yes, those works built on the foundation of Christ!

So, when it comes to the proclamation of the Gospel, to God's manifestation of changed and healed lives, to making disciples, you are on the team...and God will reward your effective works! But are you even in the game? If so, what's your "net rating?" Are you even trying to measure it? To be sure, God is!

A&A: Application & Action

1. After the events of thousands added in the early church as recorded in the book of Acts and the promise of Jesus' assessing believers' works at the Judgment Seat, did God stop being a "measurement" God with regard to Jesus' Great Commission to "go forth and make disciples?" If concluding "yes," what is the Scriptural support for that conclusion? Be specific.

2. Does your church specifically aspire to, measure, and publish its version of a "net rating" with regard to the proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and Jesus' Great Commission to "go forth and make disciples?" If "yes," access your cellphone to show your church's results to the others with you. If "no," what is your position as a congregant as to this strategic outlook of your church? Be specific.

3. Do you personally specifically aspire to and measure a type of "net rating" for you with regard to the proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and Jesus' Great Commission to "go forth and make disciples?" Be specific.