

For many years now, every so often, I hear a word or even a full teaching that warns Christians about “performance.” It goes something like this: “get off that performance treadmill that is contrary to real faith—don’t do that, it’s toxic...it’s very unhealthy for a Christian!” This type of teaching is called by various names and is typically cast in a very negative light. How about these labels that are currently in circulation? ...The Performance Trap. Performance-Based Christianity. High-Performance Christians.

And you know what? These legitimately-concerned teachers, pastors, and counselors have indeed often seen real fallout in the lives of serious Christians who have a faulty understanding. So, yes, for sure, expecting that God’s core embracing of us comes from our performance is a substantial misreading of the New Covenant in Christ. And—you’d better believe this for your own spiritual health—Jesus has fulfilled the Law on our behalf. Not understanding these types of basics on a practical basis can deeply impact our spiritual lives and, sadly, those closest to us, too, like our spouses and our kids who can be highly impacted to the negative.

So, if that’s been your personal predisposition or understanding and that really has worked into a truly debilitating circumstance of an unhealthy relationship with the Lord...first, pray to God—working to shed any inhibition you might have—and then grab ahold of good teaching from a pastor or an author on this.

But. But there’s another side to “performance.” You see, God is a God who does justly reward each and every believer on the specific quality of his or her works. Yes, it’s true! God is a “metrics” God...He measures the results of the works of each believer. Now, in our everyday workplace world where results matter, this is called metrics—that is: “the results from measuring something.” And how do we know this truth about God measuring results? Well, from 1 Corinthians 3:9-15. Here’s Paul’s passage from the ESV.

“For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.”

So, let’s unpack some key points of that short passage of Paul’s letter to the Corinthian believers.

- First, Paul starts by affirming that Christians are fellow workers with God. We’re *workers!* With *God!* To what end? Well, obviously, to foster work-product...results...that God is working on, too!
- Second, we are “God’s field, His building” ...we are the results of God’s building. And the Father sent His Son to the Cross that He and we would have eternal fellowship together. That’s results!
- Third, Paul laid a foundation on “that which is laid,” and Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, counsels that we take care how we build upon “that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” Tell me, just why would Paul tell us to “take care” if results of our efforts don’t matter?
- Fourth, on the Day of Judgement, our work for Christ’s Kingdom will become manifest...evident ...clear, whether it’s gold or silver (the good stuff!) or hay or straw (the feeble stuff!). Yes, those are *results* God is measuring, for better or for worse! Paul isn’t talking about being saved by works. We’re *saved* by Jesus’s work on the Cross, then *rewarded* for our work as soldiers in God’s army!

- Fifth, then God will test what our results are by fire, and our work may be burned up. In Paul’s teaching, the gold and silver stand the test of the fire, but the hay and straw burn to a crisp. Now, again, be sure you hear this: we believers will still be saved, because God’s grace remains in operation. I quote from 1 Corinthians 3 again: “If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved.” Beyond that saving grace, however, our works for Christ’s Kingdom will be examined. For those of us who are saved, did we spend our days on earth consciously working to build the Kingdom? If not, our work is subject to loss...a burning loss.
- But, here’s the real deal. Sixth, if the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he or she will receive a reward. Yes, God *is indeed* measuring our work! And, He is *just* in His reward!

Yes, Jesus is doing all of that for each of us personally...He is willing to measure our performance...yes, our obedience to His instructions...yes, what our obedience was throughout our lives—and then reward us *accordingly*. But, also in a very astute way, God is measuring what we do corporately as groups of believers—yes, God did that on the very first day of the Church! You see, 120 believers were obedient, and, as promised to them, God’s Holy Spirit came down. The events and commotion of this manifestation of God’s work was such that many bystanders misinterpreted what was happening. Then, Peter obediently stepped up and gave an explanation never heard before. And about three thousand souls were added that day.

Wow, did you get that? The inspired Word of God—right there in Acts 2:41—indicates that God was measuring how many people became believers. Let me repeat that. God was measuring how many people became followers of Jesus! And we know, too, that thousands more souls were added in Luke’s historical accounts. There is an unashamed tracking of metrics of the souls won throughout the book of Acts! Do you believe this great work—the sharing of the gospel to lost souls—falls into the category of works rewarded by Jesus? Well, the obvious answer is Yes and Amen!

Does this sound like *performance*? Yes! God rewards performance that is fruitfully earned in obedience to His commands, from the Great Commission to loving our neighbors. But, rest assured, He will be measuring our performance—yours and mine—because our God is a “metrics” God.

Here’s one more thing: Peter tells us that God’s wish is that *none* would perish. Still not sure God is a “metrics” God? Let me tell you this: *none* is a metric! That’s right! *None* is a metric, a measurement! Zero. Zip. God’s wish is that zero people would perish, and He was clear to count the numbers that were greater than zero throughout the book of Acts. God’s wish is our command and is the work that is set before us.

Wait a minute, let’s get this right...once more. God loves us so much that He gave His only begotten Son unto our salvation? Yes, and we only have to accept that finished work on the Cross on our behalf! And that’s no pressure at all—that’s not a “performance trap.” But our Father also loves us so much that He gives us opportunities to share in an unimaginable yet still promised reward in addition to our salvation, eternal life, and Kingdom citizenship—that additional reward for building well on that built before us!

Hey, for years I have taught college students who are Christians. And each and every one of them who believes deserves to know—indeed, *they must understand*—that we believers don’t have a works-based salvation...we can’t earn entrance into heaven. But each and every one of them who believes also very much deserves to know that every one of their works done during their entire time on earth will be judged by Jesus—scrutinized for two wonderful purposes: yes, burning up unfruitful works *and* amazing reward for those of His children who have acted upon the vision of the privilege of being fellow-workers with God.

Thankfully, gratefully, our God is a “metrics” God for the purposes of our best positioning *even beyond eternal life!* So, are you ready to perform work alongside God? Me, too! *What an amazing God we serve!*

A&A: Application & Action

1. Can a Christian experience the fullness of grace of God in daily life and still be very focused on working heartily for the Lord? Elaborate.
2. Is the “yoke” of Christ in your life light, as He promised? Explain your perspective, especially in the light of Paul’s description to the Corinthians of Christ’s reward for unburnt works at His Judgment Seat.
3. You’re saved by the blood of Jesus, praise God! Now, how are your metrics? How will God measure the work you’re doing on earth? I encourage you to start with the Great Commission as your measurement baseline: how are you doing in making new disciples, and in teaching them to grow into maturity in their walk with Jesus?