Striving for Excellence

In the Apostle Paul's letter to the Colossians Chapter 3:23 he says “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, 24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving”.

How often do we think about excellence? How many times have we heard “That’s good enough for government work.”? We all know we are not perfect, but is that an acceptable excuse to strive for anything less than that which is excellent. Are we okay with mediocre? Fathers and mothers, how about your children? Do you want them to accept anything less than their best? What about our other roles such as spiritual leader, husband, wife, supervisor, employee, student, teacher, and any other title that labels you? Do you lead the way to excellence in all that you do “with all your heart”? Self-examination time!

As lovers of Jesus Christ, and in demonstrating our appreciation for what He has done for us in saving us from our sins, we should reflect excellence in all that we do. But you may ask, how can I do that? Paul addressed the same question in his life and he answered it this way in 1 Corinthians 9:26 - “I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. 27 No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize”. Paul did not expect to ask anything of others that he was not willing and able to do himself. We must force ourselves to go above and beyond our norm, in essence, “beating our bodies to make it our slave”.

It is interesting that Paul identifies himself as someone separate from his body when he says “I beat my body and make it my slave”. Paul is forcing his body to do his bidding as his slave. Excellence does not come naturally. We must practice it and apply it to our lives. We seldom think in this way, but athletes do and that is why Paul used the analogy of the athlete in 1 Corinthians 9. In God’s kingdom here on earth, we are, for all practical purposes, athletes in training for excellence in all that we do, to God’s glory!

Paul in writing to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:11 says “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness”. You may have heard it said, in this context, that righteousness is not being “holy”. Who among us is “holy”? Righteousness means “doing that which is right in God’s eyes” on an ongoing basis and adding to (pursue) the right-ness from Christ that already exists in us. Anything good in us comes from Christ
who lives in us (2 Corinthians 13:5) and we know His power is limitless! Pursuing righteousness (doing that which is right) and striving for excellence are synonymous. As Christians, we can choose to accept a basic truth that God would not give us anything above what we can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13).

In His letter to the Philippians, Paul writes in Philippians 4:8 “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things”. Isn’t it interesting that Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, says that those things which are excellent and praiseworthy are also “noble, right, pure, lovely and admirable”?

The Apostle Paul was not alone in this concept. Simon Peter addressed it in a different way in 2 Peter 1:5 “For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ”. Knowing excellence in these matters is knowing “our Lord Jesus Christ”.

As we strive to be “noble, right, pure, lovely and admirable”, and as we “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, endurance and gentleness”, and as we “make every effort to add to (our) faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love”, let us, with God’s help, be “Striving For Excellence!

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