



# Faith Pulpit

## Whose Expectations Are We Fulfilling?

As I was reading a letter from a missionary to a supporting church, I was struck with something he wrote. I am personally acquainted with the missionary and believe him to be a very sincere and serious servant of Christ. The sentence that forced me to do some personal meditation was this: “We want to be doing the job that you, our supporters, expect of us.”

I am a strong believer in accountability because a clear sense of accountability is a good discipline to help us focus on our effectiveness. Most of us in the Lord’s work possess an intensity in striving for effectiveness in ministry. After all, isn’t it admirable to reach a high level of excellence? But what is the origin of the expectation to which we respond? Expectations can come from within, from without, and also from above. Very simply, why are we doing what we are doing? Sooner or later, in one context or another, every servant of Christ will face this question in some form. We need to think our way through this issue honestly and Biblically.

Some expectations come from within. Personal expectations for ministry effectiveness are often good. We may drive ourselves because of personal love for the Lord, a desire to see people won to Christ and built up in the faith, and because we wish to see the work of God prosper. There is also the sense of personal accomplishment in a job well done. But sometimes expectations from within may not be as wholesome as they should be. We may expect ourselves to perform faultlessly without realizing that such a motivation in and of itself could stem from a sense of insecurity, pride, fear of failure, or jealousy. It might be a worthwhile exercise to take time to write down all of one’s personal expectations and then beside each one to list the motivation which supports it.

Many expectations come from without. We may look at external circumstances, both favorable and unfavorable, and they may shape our expectations. We may observe the ministry which others have and decide we must achieve what they are achieving. It’s also possible to become controlled by what

other people, whether friends or enemies, think and expect of us. We need to understand that there are people who can do some things better than we can. I don't believe that I have ever met a Christian who possesses all of the gifts described in the Bible. There is no need for feeling like we are personally omnipotent. We cannot do all things perfectly, even though there will be some things that each one of us is able to do well.

There are also expectations that come from above—that is, they come from God. Since we are His servants, God expects faithfulness to Him and His word, He expects our loyalty. He expects us to exhibit integrity and to act with pure motives. And He details in His Word the many expectations He has of us. We are not left in doubt as to His grand expectations. Along with them, however; we also have His understanding and help.

A passage of Scripture that has helped me to keep this whole matter in correct focus is Galatians 1:10, “For do I now persuade men or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.”

Paul in Galatians 1:10 asks these questions: am I trying to win the approval of God or man? Am I seeking to please those around me? The context has to do with the gospel. Essentially Paul says that if he seeks to get a pat on the back from men, he will become man's slave and thus will not be Christ's servant. What a tragedy that would be for genuine ministry!

The Judaizers tried to discredit Paul. They alleged that he toned down the requirements of the gospel in order to gain the approval of the Gentiles. Can you imagine that? They accused Paul of trying to make his message acceptable to his hearers—even if it meant toning down God's message. That's why Paul responds with his explosive questions in verse 10, as he refers to his absolute obedience to Christ. Unfortunately, some people who seek only the favor of men can be bought. Understand that if people can't win you by flattery, they'll try to destroy you by criticism. In either case, there is no genuine love for you or your ministry!

It's possible to respond to expectations even when we're not sure where they originate. That may be a positive indication of both sensitivity and willingness. On the other hand, we must make sure that the motivation behind each response is appropriate and honoring to the Lord.

What is it that determines direction in our lives and in our ministries today? There are demands of people, demands of culture, and also demands of Scripture. How do we respond to demands in ministry? What kind of servant-image do we possess? To answer these questions we must first answer the questions, “Whose expectations are we fulfilling?” and “To whom are we ultimately accountable?” Are we merely image polishers or are we honest servants of Christ?

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