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Because It Is Right

By Jim R. Everett

Reward incentive motivation permeates our society. People respond to rewards just like little puppies do. Some parents think only in terms of rewarding their children, and they even reward them for being bad. When a parent says to a little child, "If you will quit throwing a temper tantrum, we will go get an ice cream as soon as we get away from the Dr.'s office," he is rewarding bad behavior and the child quickly understands how to get what he wants. The "in thing" now in many churches is to offer physical rewards for being religious. That ranges from the "gospel of health and wealth" that says, "If you give \$100, God will give you \$1,000," to appealing to the fleshly appetites of entertainment to get people to come to "church."

Whatever happened to doing right because it is right? Surely, Jesus offers men rewards but those incentives have nothing to do with the sensual desires. In fact, he condemned those who followed him because they were fed -- "Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life," (**John 6:29**). The reward for righteousness is eternal life with God. God expects right behavior, because he is holy and we must be like him to share in spiritual life (**1 Peter 1:15-16**).

Christians are committed to a way of life that is righteous, because it is the right way to live. Sometimes the righteous life may offer a material advantage but that isn't why the Christian lives that way. At other times, being righteous may be a difficult road and the righteous may

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be mocked and persecuted. The disciple of the Lord does right when people speak well of him and when they do not -- his motivation is doing right, because it is the right thing. to do.

Courageous Faith

By Paul Earnhart

For God gave us not a spirit of fearfulness; but of power and love and discipline. Be not ashamed of the testimony of the Lord, nor of me his prisoner; but suffer hardship with the gospel according to the power of God..." (**2 Timothy 1:7-8**)

The Prussian king Frederick the Great was widely known as an agnostic. In striking contrast, one of his most trusted officers, General Von Zealand, was a deeply convicted believer. It is reported that during a very festive gathering of his general staff, the king created uproarious laughter with his crude jokes about the Son of God. Finally, after enduring this with much patience, Von Zealand arose quietly and addressed the king: "Sire, you know that I have not feared

death. I have fought and won 38 battles for you. I am an old man; I shall soon have to go into the presence of one greater than you, the mighty God who saved me from sin, the Lord Jesus Christ whom you are blaspheming. I salute you, sire, as an old man who loves his Saviour, on the edge of eternity."

The room went deathly still, and with a trembling voice the king replied, "General Von Zealand - I beg your pardon! I beg your pardon!" and with that the party quietly ended.

It took courage for an old Prussian general to stand alone before his king and amidst his scoffing fellow officers and announce boldly and without shame his own deep faith in that God and His Son whom they were blaspheming, but that is just the kind of faith which being a follower of Christ requires. We cannot serve Him and be ashamed of Him, no matter what the odds or the dangers.

So many have stood entirely alone in defense of their confidence in the true God. **Noah** is a remarkable

example. It is difficult to conceive the loneliness of being, with your family, the only one on earth who genuinely believed in God. (This may have included his father, Lamech, and grandfather, Methuselah, who, if the genealogy is complete, died just before the flood.) But Noah was not only steadfast, he was bold, preaching earnestly to warn his contemporaries of a rapidly approaching disaster (**2 Peter 2:5**) - and at last, in the final 100 years before the deluge, rearing three sons who shared his singular faith so strongly that they were able to convert their wives (**2 Pet. 2:5**). What laughter and contempt his boat and his preaching must have provoked can be easily imagined. Noah's was a faith that blossomed in a spiritual desert against incredible odds.

Abraham was a kindred spirit. What amusement and disdain must have followed him out of Ur of the Chaldees as he left that pagan, but prosperous, city to go to some place about which he knew absolutely nothing!

The only explanation he could offer was that he went at the behest of the true and living God, risking everything on His promises. Folks that worshipped the likes of Nannar the moon-god would not have been much impressed. Abraham was all alone in his faith, a solitary figure walking out on apparent thin air. It is no marvel that he is called "the father of the faithful."

And then there is **Joseph** - friendless in Egypt, with the vivid memory of his brothers' hate and the heartbreak of a presumed abandonment by his once doting father. He could easily have felt forsaken by God as well - all those dreams and visions, and now this! Whether Potiphar's wife was a beauty or a hag is not stated by Moses, but the young Joseph, in the flower of his manhood and perhaps on the edge of despair, was certainly vulnerable to her seductions. We marvel, therefore, at the courage of his lonely, but unyielding, faith when he resists her with the words: "...how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin

against God?" (**Genesis 39:9**). How he honored the God of his fathers!

And finally there is **Moses** and **Joshua** and **Elijah** and **Jeremiah** and **Daniel** and the "**three Hebrew children**" and **John the Baptist** and the **Twelve** and **Paul**. The list is long. But our names need to be added to it. We need a holy boldness about God and His Son as we live amidst a perverse generation - an open and unashamed conviction that attaches itself not only to who Jesus is, but to what He says - "the testimony of the Lord."

There is a very good reason why we need to be uncomfortable with a faith that fades and wilts and falls back at the first hint of social disapproval. Jesus said, "Whoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the son of man also shall be ashamed of him, when he comes in the glory of his Father and with his holy angels" (Mark 8:38). Must we have a supportive crowd before our convictions find a voice, or do we have

the courage to speak up for Christ and the gospel even when we stand alone? It is a critical question which all of us must honestly face.