

REPRESENTATIVES OF CHRIST

Matthew 10:40-42 presents an ascending sequence: The apostles, Jesus, the Father. *“He who receives you receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who has sent Me.”* The apostles were like ambassadors who represent their country. An ambassador should be given the same honour as the one who has sent him. What is done to the apostles is done to the One whom they serve. Later Paul reminded the Galatians that they had received him *“as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.”*

In the next verses there is a descending progression: apostles, prophets, righteous people, little ones: *“He who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward And he who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man’s reward And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, Truly, I say to you, will certainly not lose his reward”* The last statement holds out a reward for even the least significant action done for a person usually regarded as insignificant, if it is done on the basis of being a disciple of Jesus.

If people honour prophets, they honour them because they speak forth God’s Word. Such people hear what the prophets say, because God is speaking through them. The apostle John wrote about people who went out in Jesus’ name: *“We have an obligation to support such people in order to work with them for the truth”* (3 Jn 8).

People who welcome a righteous person acknowledge that such a person is righteous before God. He has God’s approval for Jesus’ sake, and is doing what God wants.

The last in the progression are the least of Jesus’ disciples. No follower of God is too small to be His representative. The point is that God sees with approval whatever is done for his dear people who believe in Jesus. God himself acknowledges and honours those who help the least of them. Because of this, no child of Jesus is really “least.” The language of reward here does not teach salvation by works, in spite of the mention of reward. The response that follows faith indicates that the all-important faith in Jesus is there. The most treasured thing about Jesus Christ is that He is the Mediator between the Father and sinful human beings. However, He is more than the Mediator. Because of His salvation as the Mediator, He receives all the praise; and as His redeemed praise Him, the service that they do to the least significant of His “little ones” is done to Him. The principle of representation works to Him through the apparently least significant of His people. The point is that in all these actions Christ is honoured through them, and, because He is the Father’s representative, the Father is honoured through them. God treats with kindness and honour those who are engaged in His task, and the final object of those who serve Jesus is honour to Him.

In the earlier section of the Gospel reading the theme was surrender of self The connection here is that final goal of all self-surrender ought to be praise to Christ, the Saviour, the Father’s Representative.