

BOOK 31

**JUSTIFIED  
BY WORKS**

*Biblical Research Library*

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# JUSTIFIED BY WORKS

If you have been a member of the body of Christ for some time and have sat at the feet of sincere teachers of the word of God, then you will read nothing new in this book. Faithful leaders of the church have taught for years and struggled with those about whom this book speaks.

Our challenge as teachers is to educate and motivate. We must educate the flock of God concerning those things that God has revealed through His word. We must motivate the educated to rise to the occasion to work. God worked for several millennia to bring Christ into the world and us into the church. Now it is time for the saved to go to work for God. We have accomplished well the task of educating the flock. However, we are somewhat in trouble concerning our task of motivating the flock to get to work for God.

This book is both educational and challenging. I have sought to deal specifically with the problem of inactivity in reference to those who claim the name of Jesus, but are not willing to become personally involved in expressing their thanksgiving to God for all that He has done to get us into eternity.

This was not an easy book to write, and I am sure that it will not be an easy book to read. I would challenge you that in your reading that you complete the entire book. After a general historical introduction to set the stage for why the book is written, I have tried to stay with the Scriptures in order to understand what God expects of us as disciples of Jesus. I believe that the mes-

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sage of the New Testament is so strong on the subject of this book, that we must seriously come forth with repentance in order to be what God wants us to be.

If you make it through the entire book, then you have proven that you are searching for what God requires of us. I have found that those who are hard workers for Jesus seek to be challenged with studies on the subject about which this book is written. It is my prayer that this book both empowers you personally, but also generates within you the desire to alert others to the divine mandate that God will not allow into His eternal rest those who are idle. This is a message to the redeemed. It is a message that disciples who are unfruitful and unproductive will not inherit eternal glory. If you are challenged by the content of this book, therefore, then I want to encourage you to challenge others to take another look at what God requires of every Christian.

## Prologue

### A Repetition Of History

There is nothing more difficult in religious matters than to restore a restoration movement that has gone astray. Those who are of such movements often pride themselves in the exactness of their doctrinal beliefs and “scriptural behavior,” and thus they are often unapproachable in accepting the fact that they have lost their way and their first love in reference to behavior. Add to this the fact that those of restoration movements find it very difficult to confess that they have again laden themselves with cumbersome traditions, the very thing which generated their movement in the first place. But there is nothing historically new about this. From the time the Spirit shook the residents of Jerusalem two thousand years ago, the church has undergone departures and restorations, one of the first being a time in the first century when the early disciples gave up their first love.

Before the close of the first century, it took the direct intervention of Jesus through an inspired message to shake lethargic churches into the reality of their impending doom because they had lost their way. Today, we are indirect recipients of those inspired oracles, but the message has not changed. Unless lethargic Christians face the reality of their loveless theology, lampstands will again be removed as churches vanish into the abyss of being ineffective in their communities.

From statements made in inspired letters during the 60s of the first century, it seems that the problem of lethargic and lazy disciples had arisen in the church. The apostasy was so prevalent that it needed immediate attention. It needed such immediate attention that inspired Scripture came forth from the Holy Spirit to deal specifically with indifferent religiosity. You might have assumed that this was a theological problem. At first, it was not. But I suppose, the problem developed its own theology since we seek to create religion after our own behavior. But this

was not a direct theological problem. It was a life-style problem, a problem with the behavior of some in the church. In the epistles that were written during the decade of the 60s, we read statements from the Holy Spirit as “lost your first love,” “be careful to maintain good works,” and “faith without works is dead.” This was the problem. A culture of inactivity and indifference had crept into the ranks of some churches and become the normal behavior of a great number of disciples.

From prison in A.D. 61,62, Paul wrote a letter to Titus. In this letter he addressed the growing problem of indifferent and lazy religiosity. At the conclusion of the letter he wrote,

**A Culture Of Laziness  
Was Bringing Death  
To Some Churches.**

*“This is a trustworthy saying, and these things I want you to affirm confidently so that those who have believed in God **might be careful to maintain good works**”* (Ti 3:8). Would Paul have made this statement if there were no problem among churches with those who were not careful to maintain good works? Because of this exhortation in conjunction with others in the New Testament that were written at this time, it seems that an indifferent and lazy religiosity became the pattern of behavior of some disciples.

Since Paul made the statement, and since there are several other parallel statements in the Scriptures – we will discuss these throughout this book – then what was it about the times in which these statements were made that led to a lethargic and lazy culture in the church? Why were there so many in the church in the latter half of the first century who were not maintaining good works? Why had some of the early disciples deceived themselves into thinking that they could be hearers only of the word, and not doers? Is there something about New Testament teaching that promotes laziness? Or, are there some teachings that can be twisted to one’s own destruction through indifferent behavior?

Your interest in this subject has surely been aroused by the fact that you have witnessed the same today. The church in some areas of the world is burdened with indifferent religiosity. This indifference is a burden to the point that it has in many churches become the norm, rather

than the exception. Churches as a whole are often so indifferent that the truly zealous worker is intimidated or criticized because of his or her work as a disciple of Jesus. We call the zealous “obsessed,” or “radical,” or “fundamental.” New converts come into some churches with zeal and enthusiasm. After six months in the company of the indifferent, however, they too settle down and take their seat beside those who have long forgotten what it means to be a committed disciple who is working for Jesus.

From what Paul and other New Testament writers were exhorting concerning good works, we conclude that it was a time in the early church that many had resigned themselves to complacency. Some had become so indifferent that they simply rejected the needs of others with an attitude of, “Be warmed and filled.” The fact that this was happening in the early church is without question. But why? Why were even widows and orphans being neglected in a church that had the early beginnings of disciples selling their possessions in order to care for the needs of others?

If we are allowed to postulate for a moment, we could possibly discover why there are so many today who have also deceived themselves into thinking that a pew-packing Christianity is all that is essential for salvation. You have certainly heard the statement, “There are too many in the church who are sitting around waiting on heaven.” They sing “Send the light,” when all they are doing is sittin’ tight. Instead of “trust and obey,” it is rust and decay. But this is not a new phenomenon. According to the New Testament statements that we will survey throughout this book, it was also a problem in the latter part of the first century. Our task is not to prove that the problem existed then and now. The problem existed then, and it exists now. It is our task to determine why, lest we deceive ourselves into thinking that indifferent religiosity is pleasing to God.

**Our Indifference  
Will Make A Difference  
In The Final Judgment.**

We need to go back from the 60s in the first century to thirty years earlier at the very beginning of the church in the early 30s. The problem

of spiritual lethargy in the early church actually started with the legalistic nature of Judaism out of which the majority of the first converts came who were primarily Jews. The nature of Judaism gives us the first hint to the problem of spiritual lethargy that haunted the church in the latter part of the first century. The answer is in the natural swing of the pendulum from a legalistic strictness in a man-made religion to the extreme of faith-only inactivity that is supported by a misunderstanding of grace.

Judaism was strictly a legalistic, works-oriented religion. It was the “Jew’s religion” according to Paul (Gl 1:13,14). It was a religion that was built on the accumulated precepts and practices of the Jewish religious structure that was built up over the centuries prior to the coming of Jesus. At the time of the ministry of Jesus, the Jewish religious leaders were at the extreme of rejecting the commandments of God in order to keep their religious traditions (Mk 7:1-9). Adherence to the traditions was diligently enforced. The Jews even rebuked Jesus for the good deed of healing on the Sabbath (Jn 5). To the Pharisaical Jew, adherence to the institutional structure of Judaism was maintained with cultic phobia. It is not difficult to understand, therefore, that those who were burdened with such a religion, yearned for freedom.

Under the Judaistic institutional system, the religious laws of Judaism became a burden that no one could bear. When Peter stood up during the Jerusalem meeting of Acts 15 and confronted Judaizing teachers who were legalistically seeking to bind circumcision on the church, he said in reminiscing his past life in Judaism, “*Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?*” (At 15:10). Peter, and many others of the early church, had come out of the strict legalism of Judaism. They thus saw the binding of circumcision on the Gentile converts as an attempt to bring this system of legalism into the community of God. The Holy Spirit saw this as an attack against the very foundation of Christianity. As a result, possibly the first inspired New Testament Scriptures to be written was the letter to the Galatians. In

<b>Legalistic Religiosity Brought Bondage.</b>
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this letter, Paul exhorted, “*Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage*” (Gl 5:1).

The legalistic rites of Judaism were impossible to bear. Jesus knew this. When we also understand this, we can understand why He invited people to freedom. “*Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light*” (Mt 11:28-30). He promised, “*Therefore, if the Son will make you free, you will be free indeed*” (Jn 8:36). When Jesus spoke of “rest” and “freedom” in the midst of the religious culture of Judaism, the people rejoiced with a sigh of relief. He knew what they needed, and subsequently great multitudes fled to Him for the rest and freedom of His easy yoke. However, the pendulum for many swung straight through Jerusalem.

Imagine living with the burden of Judaism that was imposed by the strictness of the Pharisees. Imagine trying to follow the intricacies of what the religious leaders were binding on the backs of the faithful. Imagine trying to calculate how far to walk on the Sabbath in order not to violate the “Sabbath day journey” law. There were so many possibilities to sin against the imposed traditions of the fathers. Judaism was a religion wherein one was constantly in doubt. There was no sense of security with God in the minds and hearts of sincere Jews because one always knew that in some minute stricture he or she would fail to comply with the strictness of the traditions.

When Jesus came with the faith, grace and freedom of His easy burden, one can only imagine the power His message had in the lives of a people who could no longer bear the burden of Judaism. They came to Him by the thousands. The early church exploded into existence with thousands who sought the yoke that was easy and the burden that was light. They sought freedom in Christ, freedom from the confines of a legalistic institutional system that stymied their faith and handicapped their love. That first decade of deliverance from the institutional bond-

age of Judaism must have been very exciting. After deliverance from Egyptian bondage, there was singing all the way to Sinai. But then, rebellion set in and the promised land was denied to thousands who thought for one moment that they could create religion after their own desires. The same happened in the early church, and it seems to continually plague disciples to this day. But today, no ground will open and swallow the rebellious. No destruction will reign down on our religious centers as Jerusalem in A.D. 70. We will only sit comfortably until the last trumpet is blown when it is all over. The wicked and lazy servant will then be cast out where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth..

You know the first-century story. The exciting years out of bondage were not without problems. There were those, as Paul wrote, who “*sneaked in to spy out our liberty that we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage*” (Gl 2:4). These were those Jews who sought to bring into the church the legalistic system of justification they practiced under Judaism. This heated confrontation between bondage and freedom took place over a period of about twenty years. It stimulated two inspired New Testament letters, Romans and Galatians. However, along the way there were some casualties.

This controversy continued to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. In the decade preceding the destruction of Jerusalem, many in the church had in behavior gone from one extreme to another because of a misunderstanding of grace. The pendulum swung so far from the legalism of Judaism to indifferent religiosity that Paul questioned some in the church in Rome, “*Will we continue in sin so that grace may abound*” (Rm 6:1)? Or, as Jude defined that some had turned “*the grace of God into licentiousness ...*” (Jd 4). Paul finally instructed, “*For the time will come when they will not endure sound teaching. But to suit their itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires*” (2 Tm 4:3). “Desires” refers to behavior. They would thus seek teachers who would teach the desired behavior of the church. In many cases, the behavior was

**From Bondage To Freedom,  
We Often Go To Extremes.**

outright immoral behavior (See 1 Co 5:1ff; Rv 2:18-21). In other cases, it was simply indifferent behavior. Disciples digressed to being only hearers of the word and not doers. They lost their first love, and subsequently went in search of a pew on which to sit and wait on heaven.

The church went from being exhorted by those who were God-called teachers to calling those who would teach according to their own desires. It went from God-called to church-called preachers. And when this happens, **the church determines who teaches and what is taught.** It is a truth, that if we are not careful, we will create religion after our own desires and teachers who will condone our desires. And if we desire to be lazy, we will seek for those pulpiteers who will preach no challenging lessons that would disturb our comfort.

In response to the works-oriented nature of Judaism, some in the first century evidently just sat down in their “easy yoke” and started to wait on the coming of Jesus. **Since we are not saved by works of law, they assumed that we are not saved by any works at all.** And herein was the problem. The misunderstanding that is dealt with in Galatians and Romans was so strong that many discarded good works with works of law as an essential part of Christian behavior. As a result, many in the decade of the 60s of the early church were not careful to maintain good works. Many were thus claiming to have faith, but they did not manifest that faith through good works. Has several years of teaching on freedom and grace, and a misunderstanding of these subjects, brought the church today to the same condition?

**A Dead Faith  
Will Lead  
To The Death  
Of The Church.**

There are a host of exhortations in the New Testament that were written about twenty to thirty years after the first believers escaped the confines of a legal, works-oriented Judaism. Could it have been that some of the early disciples’ erroneous response to grace and freedom led them to be complacent in reference to their responsibility as bondservants of Jesus? It is only natural for one to sit down after his or her escape from the burden of institutional bondage. After centuries of

bearing the burden of Judaism, I think many Jewish Christians just sat down to take a rest. Their understanding of Jesus' promise of a yoke that was easy and a burden that was light was to find a pew on which to sit and a sermon by which to be soothed. They even developed a doctrine that would clear their conscience: Salvation by faith only.

I grew up in a time when legalistic religiosity was the accepted "pattern" of church behavior. We lived in the strictness of the traditions, which traditions we slipped in with the law of the covenant. Perfect church attendance was considered "faithfulness." Making sure some sort of contribution was made every Sunday was in the strictness of the legal system. One could contribute from one cent to one hundred dollars; it did not make any difference. We just made sure something was contributed, a song was sung, a prayer uttered, a sermon preached, and a little sip and chip at the Lord's Table was performed. We could easily listen to hell-fire-and-brimstone sermons because we knew that all our legal bases were covered. Only the "denominations" had a problem about which to worry, for we judged that they had created religiosity out of their own traditions, assuming that we had no traditions.

We must always be cautious about developing a conscience-soothing religiosity that brings us into the bondage of our traditions, which traditions we often conveniently deny that we have. In such a system one can sign off God with a closing prayer and be on his or her way to the "secular" world and "our time." This is a convenient religiosity that makes no demands in an industrial/business culture where possessions become the god of the "American dream." Religious convenience and a god who is boxed into an "hour of worship" is not angry with our indifference. And thus, we are in bondage, but we do not know it.

This is what is called "institutionalized churchianity." The bondage becomes such a way of life that you desire to stay in Egypt. And when you are freed, you want to go back to bondage. We must not forget that there is always a sense of security in bondage. Slaves do not have to make decisions or think. They do not have to dig love out of their hearts in order to work. They are just secure in being told what to do and when

to do it. No self-motivation is needed when ceremonial acts of worship soothe consciences. People who are set free, but think like slaves, will always go back into bondage.

However, most people know that there is something wrong with being in bondage as a spectator in an institutionalized church wherein “church work” is done by the professionals and the “laity” sits idly by in silence. We know that God wants more out of us personally, for we want more out of ourselves. We know that our spiritual plateaus are neither acceptable to ourselves nor God. We thus go searching, searching for freedom from our own institutional confines. But in reaction to the strictness of our religiosity that we conveniently legalized into a systematic theology, most often make a great discovery. They make this discovery in the message of words like “freedom” and “grace.” This is an exciting discovery. I must tell you that this is a great discovery, for when one is set free he or she truly grows in a labor of love.

During the latter seventies and eighties, grace was discovered and proclaimed from pulpits across the land. We rejoiced! We could rejoice in the fact that now at last we found relief from the burden of the legal past. The Red Sea parted, and we headed for the promised land. There were no more taskmasters, no more burdensome bricks to make. Freedom and grace were great.

**We Are Not Saved  
By Works Of Law,  
But We Cannot  
Be Saved  
Without Good Works.**

Unfortunately, I think some fell victim to a natural swing of the religious pendulum. Since there were no more taskmasters to make us make bricks, we assumed that no bricks had to be made. We relaxed from doing good works as a result of being delivered from the burden of a legalistically structured institutional religion. We relaxed in the fact that we presumed that we are no longer saved by any performance, but by the grace of God. So we threw the baby out with the bath water. **Because we failed to make a distinction between works of law and good works, good works went out the window with works of law.** We reasoned that if one is not saved by works, then we erroneously

concluded that one is saved by no works at all. It was grace only, faith only. So we sat down in the grace of God, put up our feet with a convenient faith, and hired the most prolific preacher we could find in order not to disturb our comfort zone. The warm, white sands of the Sinai felt good.

During the 90s, and to this present day, some are still twitching their toes in the sands of Sinai, taking it easy on their pews, waiting on heaven. The hell-fire-and-brimstone sermons are all gone. There are no performance-oriented sermon topics that shake us into activity. No one any longer knows the song, “To the Work, To the Work.” Prayers are about me and my needs. Our assemblies now take on the nature of a well orchestrated concert that appeals to my desires, which desires, when satisfied, will settle me further into my complacency. The assembly that has the best performance on Sunday morning is the one that grows as it appeals to the “me religiosity” that I have instituted for myself. We say to the world, “Be warmed and filled” when no missionary is allowed to again address the entire church on Sunday morning. The needs of the world have been relegated to meeting rooms with special committees. No one is allowed to challenge our budgets that are consumed by a ministerial staff that professionally ministers to our every need. Special contributions to visiting evangelists are gone lest our budgets be endangered. In order to generate any “works” (involvement), we have hired professionals. Instead of being driven by the power of God in our lives, we are organized, and prompted by the skillful rhetoric of a professional who has been trained in the skills of communication in order not to offend or drive away any healthy contributors. So here we are at ease in Zion, thinking that all is well at the foot of Sinai. We even created a god after our own imagination and started yearning for the comforts of Egypt.

**Institutional Religionists  
Perfect The Institution  
In Order To  
Bring Into Bondage  
The Institutionalized.**

Are we repeating history? Have we emphasized grace and freedom to the point that we have led ourselves to believe that we are justified by faith alone, without works? For some reason many churches have ceased

to grow as the evangelistic spirit has long since departed. Some have lost their first love in an effort to be an acceptable church in the community with all the frills of a social club that no one could reject. I think it is a time where the Ephesian Syndrome has set in.

The Ephesian church exploded into existence and growth in Acts 19. Aquila and Priscilla, with Paul who came later, labored diligently night and day with the disciples in this city. Paul taught house to house (At 20:20). Elders were exhorted to keep the faith (At 20:28-38). They had experienced special miracles from the hand of Paul (At 19:11,12). All Asia heard the gospel during a period of two years when Paul stayed in Ephesus in the early establishment of the Ephesian church (At 19:8-10). An inspired epistle from the Holy Spirit was later written to the Ephesian church. It had a great history, from the exciting times of its beginning to the time of the writing of the epistle of Ephesians. What a great success story.

But something went wrong. By the time Revelation was written, probably twenty years after the initial establishment, the Ephesian disciples were in trouble. Through the special message of Revelation, Jesus exhorted the Ephesians, “*Nevertheless, I have this against you, **that you have left your first love. Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and will remove your lampstand out of its place – unless you repent***” (Rv 2:4,5). The Ephesian church was dying in its own lethargy. They had left their first love. They had left their first works. The works were all gone. Death had settled in. Without love and works, the Ephesian church was nigh unto vanishing away. The only hope was repentance, and repentance means a restoration of the first love and an activation of the first works. Without either, it was certain death and doom.

**Dying Churches  
Must Repent.**

I call this the Ephesian Syndrome. It is the birth and death of a church over a period of three to four decades. There is initially rapid growth and excitement for the first ten years. The growth then plateaus

for about two decades, and finally, there is death and decline and disappearance. The lampstand of influence is removed.

Is the lampstand of community influence now being removed in your area as churches grow grey headed and die? Is history repeating itself as the Ephesian Syndrome casts a dark shadow over countless churches that have long since left their first love and first works? The Ephesian Syndrome is not something that is new to our age. However, in our age it seems to have excelled to the point of taking away many in this generation of the church. In the next twenty years in the American church scene several churches will no longer exist as the present aging membership passes on. I recently discussed this matter with the preacher of one church that the average attendee was sixty-five years old. Where will this church be in fifteen years?

Our battles with legalistic religiosity were correct. We are not saved by works of law, but by the grace of God. No one will any longer argue this point. However, in our battles to deliver ourselves from the burden of legal religion, some have again run through Jerusalem. We have for-

<p><b>Disciples Are Free To Obey</b></p>
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gotten Paul's exhortation of Romans 3:31. *"Do we then make void law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish law."* It is not that we are turning the grace of God into licentiousness. Neither is it that we are sinning "that grace may abound." What is happening is what Peter warned, *"Live as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but as the bondservants of God"* (1 Pt 2:16). We are free and under grace. But we are free to serve as bondservants in our appreciation for grace. We are not free from good works. On the contrary, we have been set free in order to get to work. We are created new in Christ for work (Ep 2:10). If we think we have been set free to do nothing, then we have used God's grace as a "covering for evil." We must not forget this point as we journey through the exhortations of Scripture that speak of the Christian's responsibility to "establish law" by obedient work.

This is a time, therefore, when we must look again at good works.

Our misunderstanding of grace has made us paranoid about works. When was the last time you heard a preacher preach fervently on maintaining good works? You have probably heard a great deal of teaching on grace. But as we look through our lesson outlines as teachers, when was the last time we taught a lesson entitled, “Justified by works”?

Have we developed an assembly-oriented churchianity that requires only “faithful” attendance, and a down payment contribution that will maintain the institutional religion which conforms to our urban business world? I have found that in wealthy cultures, contribution has often taken the place of personal involvement, and attendance at the assemblies has redefined “faithfulness.” In such social/economic cultures, the rich are allowed to give, but not encouraged to become personally involved. But I question this in reference to my understanding of what God seeks from His children.

When young and attending a school for learning the Bible, I remember the instructors saying to the class on different occasions, “Boys, the church is being killed by good ole boys.” I never understood at the time what was being said. Now I know. We have many “good ole boys” leading churches through fine-tuned business meetings, but no one is being stirred up to love and good works (Hb 10:24,25). No one is being baptized as a result of members evangelistically going out and teaching the lost. We live in an age when attendance will suffice the legal standard by which we are considered a “faithful member.” We have a house full of “good ole boys” who are void of good ole works.

Now allow me to explain myself. I am not saying that these “good ole boys” will refuse to help you when you are in need. The fact is, they will. If you are in trouble, they are there for you. This is the church bearing the burdens of one another (Gl 6:1,2). One will often call these “passive good works.” These are good works that might take place only when the need arises. And we have a great many churches who have developed great fellowships in taking care of needs that “may arise.”

As we study through the nature of the works that are defined in the New Testament, however, I believe we will make a startling discovery.

“Passive works” are certainly in the Scriptures. We must take care of needs that “may arise.” But I think there is more, a lot more. For lack

**Disciples Must Plan  
And  
Accomplish Work.**

of a better term, I will call these **initiated works**. In other words, **these are those works that are intentionally planned and accomplished**. In fact, I believe the New Testament teaches that we must meet together for the specific purpose of identifying works to be done, assigning those works to be accomplished, and making sure these works are accomplished. Does this sound extreme? It depends on how deep you are slid into a pew. Initiated works are what define our faith. They determine our sonship and whether we are identified by love. They are the identity of discipleship. And if one does not have them in his or her life, he or she is not a faithful disciple of Jesus.

As you study through the remaining chapters, you be the judge. If you are not one who continually initiates good works in your life, then listen to the countless exhortations in the word of God concerning the responsibility that we as Christians must take action. We must take action in our lives to initiate good works in order to manifest our faith and love. If you find yourself suffering from the Ephesian Syndrome, then the only way out is what Jesus exhorted the Ephesian church to do. Repent and get busy.

You will not find this to be a “feel-good book.” Initiated work is what defines the Christian life. And if you have not been initiating good works in your behavior as a disciple, then your comfort zone is about to be shaken. I will stick to the Scriptures and explain them as best I can. But I want you to understand that this is something that deeply disturbs me concerning many Christians in these times. We have developed a passive religiosity that is void of initiated works. And as a result, we are paying the price in our lethargy, the death and decline and disappearance of many churches. The earth is filled with churches that are nigh unto vanishing away. Therefore, it is a time for revival, repentance, and a restoration of the first love and works in order to restore the first church.

## Chapter 1

**JUSTIFIED BY WORKS**

It was our Lord's brother who was directed by the Holy Spirit to inscribe the words of James 2:14-26. It was a time in history that saw the rise of idleness and lethargy in some disciples. Some had lost their first love that drove the early disciples into all the world. When reading the first chapter of the letter, James indicated that there was a problem among the Jewish brethren when he wrote, "*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, **deceiving yourselves***" (Js 1:22). When he gets to chapter 2, he writes the most direct material in the New Testament that demands good works in the life of a disciple.

There is something deceptive about idleness, something that is dangerously cunning in leading the believer to conclude that "all is well in Zion," when actually a church is nigh unto having its lampstand removed. We often associate deception with error, but in James 2, James wants us to understand that **this deception is believing that one can be a disciple without good works.**

*"For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror, for he observes himself and goes his way, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was"*

(Js 1:23,24). The one who loses his zeal for work has

forgotten from where he came. He has forgotten his cleansing by the blood of Jesus. This point is the introduction to the context of James 2:14-26. By the time James completes his inscription, our conclusion from what he writes is that **the disciple who does no work is not justified before God, and thus not a disciple of faith.**

The disciple works because of his thanksgiving for the grace of God (2 Co 4:15). In his appreciation for who he is in Christ, he labors in thanksgiving for the work of God to get him to where he is in Christ.

<p><b>Idle Disciples Are Forgetful People.</b></p>
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James thus lays the foundation upon which his direct exhortation of chapter 2 will be laid. **The one who is not full of good works is dead because he has no appreciation for what God has done for him.** God's grace toward him was in vain (See 1 Co 15:10). The fruitless disciple, therefore, is unfaithful to God's appeal to him or her by His grace.

### A. A workless faith profits nothing.

In verses 14-17, James asks questions for which he knows we know the answers. They are questions of reason that demand logical conclusions. James' key words in this section are "profit" and "dead."

*What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them those things that are needful to the body, what does it profit? Even so faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*

1. **"What does it profit ...":** "Profit" metaphorically refers to our salvation, for it is salvation that one seeks to receive as a result of his faith. We have given our life as an investment. But James is asking if faith, divorced from works, will bring one to the desired "profit" of salvation. In other words, can faith alone save him if there is no investment of good works? James does not have to answer the question. He knows that we can conclude that faith, without the investment of works, will not produce the profit of salvation. Dead faith has no profit.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>There Is No Salvation Without Good Works.</b></p>
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2. **"Naked and destitute":** The illustration of verses 15 & 16 is striking. The very fact that the workless person has said, "Depart in peace ..." indicates that there was personal communication between the destitute and the one who had the opportunity to give. Could it be that

James seeks to identify the heartless nature of the one whose faith has no works? If so, then surely the answer to the question, “What does it profit,” is answered in the negative. There is no profit toward one’s salvation if personal encounters with needs do not produce a positive response.

Those things that are “needful to the body” in this context could refer to the survival of the destitute. Without giving those things that are necessary for survival, life is in danger. We wonder what moves one to be so hardened as to turn away from a brother who is in such peril? In the context James refers to the destitute as a brother who would come and ask. Out of hopelessness, the destitute ask. Those who turn away the destitute have no claim of being disciples of Jesus. James’ conclusion that he wants us to understand is that the disciple who does not work for Jesus has a heart problem. It is not simply a problem of no works. **It is a problem of the heart of those who feel no compassion, and thus they are not moved into action.**

3. **“Faith ... is dead”**: And surely it is. Faith without works is as a boat with only one oar. It is driven askew. It is without direction. It goes only in a circle of death. The word “dead” is used here in reference to having no profit toward one’s salvation. The deception that James earlier introduced in 1:22 is in the fact that some had become content to believe that faith alone is profitable for salvation. However, James seeks to exemplify the extent of the deception by the vivid nature of the illustration. Those who claim to be Christian, and yet, would not give that which is needful for the survival of others, are destitute of a heart that is necessary for salvation. One is truly deceived if he or she thinks there is salvation in a faith that does not act.

<p><b>God Does Not Accept A Workless Faith</b></p>
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## **B. By works faith is made perfect.**

In the context of verses 18 - 24 James is directing us toward a final conclusion. That conclusion is, “*You see then that a man is justified*

by works and not by faith only” (vs 24). In order to arrive at this conclusion, James seeks to illustrate through reason and the example of Abraham the inseparable link between faith and works. He makes his message salvational when he states that we are “justified by works.”

*But someone may say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. The demons also believe and tremble. But are you willing to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father **justified by works** when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and by works was faith made perfect. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God and it was credited to him for righteousness.” And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is **justified by works** and not by faith only.*

1. “**Show me your faith ....**”: Verse 18 is the point. “**I will show you my faith by my works.**” The conclusion is that the faith about which James is speaking cannot be verbalized. It must be shown through works, not words. **The faith that saves, therefore, must be demonstrated in the life of the believer.** It is thus impossible to show one’s faith without works. It is impossible to expect salvation without a life of good works.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>True Faith Is Manifested By Good Works.</b></p>
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Many have less faith than demons (vs 19). At least the demons tremble as a result of their belief. They know that there is a God. They know that they will face an end of destruction (Mt 25:41). Demons tremble, when men without works who claim faith, are motionless. We conclude that the faith of a workless Christian is less than that of demons.

“*Are you willing to know*” foolish disciple that a dead faith will not bring one into eternal glory (vs 20)? The doctrine of salvation by a faith that has no works is here classified as **foolish**. Could James have been more blunt against the theology that justifies discipleship without works. Herein is our first indication of the great apostasy of James’ day. And

herein we see history repeated by those today who would seek to claim faith verbally, and yet have no demonstration of faith in their lives. In James' words, salvation without a demonstration of faith is certainly a foolish doctrine promoted by foolish theologians.

It is interesting to note how James introduces the preceding thought. "Are you willing to know?" I have found that workless Christians are not willing to know their state of condemnation. They are not willing to know that faith alone will not save. They are thus paranoid about the doctrine of justification by works. They have an obsession with "salvation by faith," to the point that any teaching that would demand works must be contrary to "salvation by faith." They are simply not willing to know what James is here teaching concerning the necessity of good works in the life of a disciple.

**2. "Abraham ... justified by works":** You might think that this is an extreme illustration of faith. I believe, as James, that the foolishness of the workless faith doctrine demands an extreme illustration. But it is not extreme when we consider the negative impact that a group of accepted dead-faith disciples have on churches. James is seeking to shock these disciples back to the reality that God demands work, for it is by a working faith and love that His children are known (Jn 13:34,35).

Genesis 22 is a demonstration of the extent to which God expects our faith to go. In Genesis 22:2 God instructed Abraham, "*Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.*" In the very next verse it is recorded, "***So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him***" (Gn 22:3).

**The Foolish  
Lay Idle  
In The  
Self-destruction  
Of Their Theology  
Of Dead Faith.**

Abraham rose early. The command to make the offering must have come in the night or the preceding day. But since Abraham "rose early,"

he must have slept through the night. What kind of faith is this that will allow one to trust so confidently in God, even when asked to offer one's only son?

Without hesitation, Abraham arose early to carry out the command. There was no delay. There was no hesitation, no argument, no procrastination. Immediate obedience resulted from the command. This is what an Abrahamic faith does. This is the type of faith God demands.

**An Active Faith  
Responds  
Immediately.**

It took Abraham and company more than three days' journey to arrive at the place of offering (Gn 22:4). Upon arrival, Abraham first left the two young men at the initial camp. "*Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you*" (Gn 22:5). Abraham's faith led him to say "we," both he and Isaac. Without any previous illustration of bodily resurrections in history, Abraham's faith was in God's power to resurrect. We must not think that Abraham was going off with Isaac to bargain with God. He intended to carry out the command. However, the Hebrew writer informs us that Abraham believed that God would bring to life that which he would kill. "***He concluded that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead ...***" (Hb 11:19).

Both the Genesis account and Hebrews 11:17 refer to this incident as a "testing" of Abraham's faith. We know he passed the test because of his performance. Faith, therefore, that is manifested through obedience in the life of the one who professes to believe, will pass the test of God's demands. When commanded, Abraham immediately headed for the place of offering. His faith acted. When he and Isaac came to the place of offering, he "*stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son*" (Gn 22:10). His faith worked without hesitation. He lifted his hand because he believed in a resurrection for which he had no proof.

**Lethargy Is  
A Virus That  
Will Kill  
A Church.**

So was Abraham justified by works (Js 2:21)? Yea, truly! James 2:23 is a judgment statement. James refers to Scripture when he wrote,

“Abraham believed God and it was credited to him for righteousness.” Abraham was credited with righteousness because he acted on his faith. **The conclusion is that one is not credited with righteousness if he does not act on his faith.** A workless faith will always leave one in debt.

Of Abraham, James wrote, “*And he was called the friend of God*” (Js 2:23). And so we would conclude that one who does not act on his faith **is not a friend of God.** A “friend of God” is one who not only obeys what God says, he is one who works on the principle of doing that which is good to all men (Gl 6:10). He is the one who works in thanksgiving for the grace of God (2 Co 4:15). God’s true friends go to work for Him.

<p><b>We Pass The Test Only When We Work.</b></p>
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**3. “Not by faith only”:** I suppose some would ignore this statement. But James is very straightforward. “*You see then that a man is justified by works and not by faith only*” (Js 2:24). James did not say one is justified by works alone. Such would be legalism, seeking to earn one’s way to heaven. Neither did he say that one is saved by faith alone. Such would be ignoring the good works that manifest a loving heart that is suitable for eternal dwelling. It is faith and works. Without either, there is no salvation. Without faith, there is no salvation. Without initiated works, there is no salvation. If I understand correctly what James is saying, one cannot be saved if there are no personal, self-initiated good works in his or her life toward the needs of others. In other words, if you are doing nothing, just sitting comfortably on a bench or pew on Sunday morning, **you have no reason to expect to be called to glory when you die or when Jesus comes.** Quite scary, isn’t it!

When we see what Abraham did, we understand that there is no friendship with God through a faith that does not stimulate works. There is no righteousness in reference to God without works. Those who would idly sit on pews without works of righteousness, should be reminded of James’ introductory statements to this context, that they not deceive themselves into thinking that they are saved if they are not zealous of good

works (Js 1:22).

### C. Faith without works is dead.

James concludes his letter with an illustration from one who lived contemporary with, but outside the fellowship of the people of God who experienced the marvelous miracles of God. Rahab was a Gentile. She had only heard of the wonders of Israel's exodus from Egypt. And yet, she believed. She would be as we who have not personally experienced a miracle of God. She was more blessed because she believed without personally witnessing that in which she believed. She was not as Thomas who needed visual confirmation in order to believe (Jn 20:25). She would be in the group about whom Jesus spoke, "*Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed*" (Jn 20:29). She, as we, need no miracle in order to have the type of faith that is pleasing to God (Hb 11:6). For Rahab, the testimony of others was sufficient. So we must dispel with this notion that we must have a direct manifestation from Deity in order to have the faith that moves one into action. The example of Rahab proves that strong faith can be built on the testimony of others.

**The Blessed  
Believe Without  
The Need  
Of A Miracle.**

*Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot **justified by works** when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? (Js 2:25)*

1. "**Rahab the harlot**": James again assumes that his readers can correctly answer the question concerning the justification of Rahab. She was justified because she received the spies of Israel (Ja 2 & 6). "*By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace*" (Hb 11:31). It seems that Rahab stood alone in Jericho as a believer. We are given little information about her life. She only believed the report that came to her concerning the delivery of Israel from Egyptian captivity, Israel's con-

quest of neighboring kings, and how God had swallowed up the Egyptian army in the Red Sea (Ja 2:8-13). But because of the reports, she acted, though the others of Jericho did not. Their hearts melted with the reports, but Rahab responded. They trembled, but it takes more than trembling to evidence a faith that justifies one before God. Demons tremble, but disciples carry out their faith with action.

Rahab lied in order to save the spies. She “*sent them out another way*” than what she told those who questioned her (Ja 2:4-7). Her fear of God was greater than her fear of man, for if she was caught in the lie by the residents of Jericho, surely she would have paid with her life. Nevertheless, in this account, Rahab was justified by works. And since verse 25 is a question, James assumes that we will agree.

Her lie was justified by a higher law at the time. Israel’s conquest of the land had priority. It was the same situation as David when he ate without sin the showbread that was to be eaten only by the priests of Israel (Nm 28:9,10; Mt 12:3,4), he too stood justified before God by breaking the law. His preservation as the anointed king of Israel had priority over the law that the priest only eat of the showbread.

**2. “*The body without the spirit is dead*”:** The next time you look at a dead body, think of a faith that is not manifested by works. James’ definition of a Christian without works is simply a dead Christian. It is as the preacher who one Sunday morning brought a coffin before the assembly, and placed it closed between himself and the audience. He preached on the subject, “The Dead Church.” Once the sermon was concluded, he asked for each of the members to come forward and look into the coffin in order to see a “dead church.” As each member passed by and looked in, he or she walked away shocked and embarrassed. The preacher had placed a mirror in the coffin. “*For as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.*”

James leaves us with a clear understanding of what God expects of our faith. God expects work, and if we do not work, we cannot be saved. His words are direct. They cut to the very heart of a dead or

dying church. When a culture of lethargy sets into a group of Christians, direct words as these of James must cut as a sword. They must cut out the lazy in order to preserve those who want to work for Jesus. This was the very foundation upon which the mandate of 2 Thessalonians 3:6 was written. Some had quit their jobs. They were living off other disciples. They were lazy. Paul commanded, “... *withdraw yourselves from every brother who walks disorderly and not after the tradition [of work] that he received from us.*” He spoke as James. “... *if anyone is not willing to work, neither let him eat*” (2 Th 3:10). The point is that one must work.

## Chapter 2

# A MIND TO WORK

Israel learned a great historical lesson from her cycle of rebellions and restorations. The nation had gone the route of one thousand years of repetitive rebellions and restorations by the time God allowed Babylon to take the final two tribes into captivity. They thus reaped the whirlwind of blowing against the will of God. The end result was captivity, both Assyrian (722/21 B.C.) and Babylonian (586 B.C.). And at the end of this history of turmoil, only a small remnant made their way back from captivity to resettle the promised land. They learned through this divine discipline something that is best discovered in their attitude and actions in rebuilding the city of Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity. They brought forth fruits of repentance.

When Cyrus came to the throne of the Medo-Persian Empire in 538 B.C., Israel's woes were over in reference to being in foreign captivity for their sins. It was a time in 536 B.C. for God's people to start going home. Zerubbabel led an initial group of the remnants in 536 B.C. This was followed by Ezra's group in 457 B.C. And finally, Hanani came from Judah to Nehemiah in the palace of Shushan in Babylon with a

report concerning the survivors of the captivity and the condition of the city of Jerusalem. The report was not good. *“The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire”* (Ne 1:3).

**God’s Leaders  
Cry And Mourn  
Over  
The Incompletion  
Of His Work.**

When Nehemiah heard this report, he *“sat down and wept and mourned for many days”* (Ne 1:4). He fasted and prayed. After confessing the rebellion of Israel – the reason for their disbursement among the nations – Nehemiah recounted before God His promise of their restoration to the promised land. God had promised, *“... if you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them ... I will gather them from there [the land of their captivity], and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name”* (Ne 1:8,9). And so it happened.

Nehemiah went to Judah. In the middle of the night, and in the company of a few trusted friends, he surveyed the destruction of Jerusalem. He then presented his vision to the officials. *“You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach”* (Ne 2:17). After reassuring them that God would be with them, he urged, *“Let us rise up and build”* (Ne 2:18). What happened next is one of the most remarkable stories of history that is recorded in the Bible. It is a story of determination and accomplishment. It is a story that reaffirms how God made us, that is, if we are united in our goals, nothing will be withheld from us which we determine to do (Gn 11:6).

But before we get to the story of Nehemiah, we must take a brief look at what had already happened in the restoration of Israel to their homeland. Ezra, a contemporary of with Nehemiah, recorded that the rebuilding of the temple began in the days of Cyrus (Ez 3:8-13; 5:16). However, opposition arose from the Samaritans who were dwelling in the land (Ez 4:1-5). The work subsequently ceased during the early

reign of the Medo-Persian Darius (Ez 4:24). While work was idle, the people focused on their own living. They began to live comfortably while the city as a whole continued to lay in ruins (See Ez 1:9). God then sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to motivate the people to continue the reconstruction, which they did (Ez 4:24; 5:1ff). During the reign of Darius, reconstruction of the temple was completed in 515 B.C. (Ez 6:13-16). However, because of persistent opposition, work again ceased on reconstruction of the remainder of the city. It was not until the coming of Nehemiah in 444 B.C., over ninety years after the initial return of captives in 536 B.C., that work began in order to complete the remainder of the city. It was during the first year after Nehemiah's arrival that the walls of the city were eventually completed and a national revival in faith occurred among the Jews (Ne 12:27 - 13:31).

But it took the remnant over ninety years to get the job done. There is a lot to be learned in this historical fact. I believe that the truths revealed in their inability to accomplish the mission of rebuilding the city teaches some very valuable lessons.

When Nehemiah first went to the promised land, his mission was to complete reconstruction of the city and to reform the spiritual life of the returnees. After he surveyed the ruins upon his arrival, he gave a stirring exhortation to the residents. The result of his exhortation was that ***“they set their hands to do this good work”*** (Ne 2:18). And work they did. Against all opposition, they set themselves to the task of bringing into reality their dreams. It thus took a unique leader to arise when the time was right to stir a lethargic group into action.

<p><b>Good Work Must Be Continued In The Face Of All Opposition.</b></p>
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However, when good things are about to happen, we cannot expect Satan to stand in applause in the cheap seats. Quite the opposite. The determined workers faced the opposition Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem. Nehemiah said, ***“They laughed us to scorn and despised us”*** (Ne 2:19). So he answered their ridicule by encouraging the workers, ***“The God of heaven Himself will prosper us”*** (Ne 2:20). But the workers'

antagonists persisted. They mocked the zealous workers (Ne 4:1). “*What are these feeble Jews doing?*” (Ne 4:2). “*Whatever they build, if even a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall*” (Ne 4:3). And so the opposition continued. There were continued threats. Continued ridicule. Slander. There was even a conspiracy to kill Nehemiah (Ne 6).

But through the continual encouragement of Nehemiah, the determined workers persisted. They were able to persist against such great odds because of a spirit that Nehemiah generated in their hearts. That spirit was, “***The people had a mind to work***” (Ne 4:6). If they had not this spirit, they would certainly have succumbed to the tremendous opposition they faced during the reconstruction. But because the people had a mind to work, the walls and city were rebuilt. Good leaders know how to stir up the group to love and do good works.

In Genesis 11 it is stated that God came down from heaven during the days when men sought to accomplish the misguided goal of building a tower whose top would be in the heavens. Though their goal and purpose was wrong, God made a statement about the nature of man which He had created: “... ***nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them***” (Gn 11:6).

<p><b>God Created Every Man With The Ability To Do Great Things.</b></p>
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God created us with this nature. If we make a plan, establish a goal, have a united mind to work, nothing will be withheld from us which we determine to do. This is our blessing from our Creator. It can be used for great things. In the case of the tower of Babel, this nature was used to accomplish a goal that was contrary to the will of God. Nevertheless, we can do fantastic things if we have a mind to work in unison toward a common goal.

Judah’s situation during the days prior to the arrival of Nehemiah, as well as Nehemiah’s leadership, does illustrate a problematic condition that often sets in among disciples. Think about this for a moment. The first captives arrived in 536 B.C. Nehemiah did not arrive in Judah until 444 B.C. I realize that we do not know the exact dates of the specific

events, however, just for speculation, subtract 444 from 536. The result is **ninety-two years**. The walls of the city and the city itself lay in waste until ninety-two years after the initial return of captives from Babylon. In fact, **the whole generation of older returnees would have died before Nehemiah arrived on the scene and did his work of reconstruction and completion of the walls of the city.**

I suppose the initial returnees had accomplished their own personal goal. They did make a decision and carry out the goal of returning to the land. In their enthusiasm, these first returnees did begin the work of reconstructing the temple, which task was completed. However, their goal of rebuilding all the city stopped in the face of opposition from the residents who were already in the land upon their arrival.

The returnees then focused on building a comfortable life for themselves. In reference to the Jews' initial goal, the opposition to rebuild the city prevailed during the ninety-two years of idleness. Satan had accomplished his goal of discouraging the people. Whatever the situation was at the time of Nehemiah's call, it was a situation over which Nehemiah cried and grieved for many days when it was first reported to him (Ne 1:4). After ninety-two years, the job had not been done. I suppose that is something over which any serious leader would cry and grieve. A ninety year old dead church is nothing about which to rejoice, even though its attendance might be in the thousands. It would be something that Nehemiah, the preacher, cried about. And in this case, the people needed to repent and get to work.

Is there any crying and grieving among us today concerning the incompleteness of building the church throughout the world? Where are our crying Nehemiahs? Does a whole generation of discouraged and lethargic churchgoers have to die before there can be a revival? The initial returnees had dreams. But because of opposition, their dreams

**Idle Churches  
Bring No Glory  
To God.**

faded away in the midst of their building a comfortable life for themselves. Is this necessary with God's kingdom business today? When a lethargic culture is established in a church, must that whole group die

before a church can get growing again?

Why would a generation of returnees sit idly by while the city laid in ruins? There is at least one reason why this can happen. **When a group, or society as a whole establish a norm in behavior, the few cannot overcome the masses who maintain the norm.** It takes exceptional leadership to revive dead movements, if the movements can be revived at all. The leadership that is necessary to revive dead dreams must be willing to take the blows. As Nehemiah, they must be willing to endure **ridicule** (Ne 2:19), **mocking** (Ne 4:1-3), **conspiracy** (Ne 6:1,2) and **slander** (Ne 6:5-7). If the leadership of a restorational paradigm shift is not willing to accept what comes from the opposition, no walls will be built, no cities rebuilt, no world will be evangelized. Unmotivated citizens will allow the city of God to remain in ruins until leadership cries and mourns over the incomplete work of God in our lives.

The problem with the initial leadership that arrived in Palestine was that **their bodies had arrived in Judah, but their minds were still held in captivity back in Babylon.** When the generation of the initial returnees died, they had passed on to their sons and daughters an insecure spirit that easily succumbed to opposition. Their fathers had been second rate citizens in Babylonian captivity for so long that they could not think for themselves. They had been told what to do, how to do it, and when to do it, for so long, that they could not make their own decisions. There was a real insecurity among the initial returnees, so real that they could not emotionally prevail against the opposing leadership who were in Judah upon their arrival, which leadership still prevailed at the time of Nehemiah's arrival. The local leadership, a cross between Jews who had been left from previous destructions and those imported into Palestine by Assyria and Babylonia, and a few Arabs, had estab-

**Great Leaders  
Know That  
They Are Free  
To Build.**

lished their own culture. They controlled the local scene. They thus imposed on the returnees that they had to fit in with the established norms of the culture. Thus, the new arrivals seemingly had no chance for a spiritual revival that would be symbolized by

the rebuilding of Jerusalem. The local, established culture was too great, and the minds of the returnees were still suffering from the bondage of a seventy-year captivity in Babylon. Among a resident people who no longer considered Israel the covenanted people of God or who considered the purpose of God to be accomplished through Israel, there was great opposition about the Jews establishing any identity for themselves.

Does this sound like a modern-day church drama? Are there churches that have compromised the purity of their Christianity with the culture of indifference in which they live? Are we led by insecure leaders who have no guts, grit and gall to stand against ridicule, mocking, conspiracy and slander? Have surrounding religions established the status quo to the extent that our desire to fit in is stronger than our desire to build the city of God? Do we fear men more than God? Is it that we leave our Nehemiahs out there to take the blows of opposition in order that they be brought back into line with the norms of lethargy? Does our existing leadership fear the established religious culture of the society in which we live more than they fear the God for whom they should be working in order to accomplish God's mission? Has living comfortably become more important than building the temple of God among the nations of the world? Have we simply just forgotten who we are, and thus we have given ourselves over to become like the religious nations around us?

We must give credit to the initial returnees of Israel. After all, they had a "mind to work" upon their arrival in Palestine. The temple was rebuilt. But they eventually became intimidated by their circumstances, and thus gave up the mission to rebuild the entire city. They became discouraged by opposition, and subsequently, died. Every Sabbath they sat there in their pews, reading in the prophets about great times in the past, the way it was. They read about the great stories of how their forefathers defied the Pharaoh of Egypt. They read about how Samson beat up on the Philistines, how David led the nation to have a national identity, and how Hezekiah prevailed against the armies of Assyria. Those were great stories. For ninety years they were told every Sabbath about the glories of their heritage. **But they did nothing!** A whole generation

died off and a new, more secure generation that did not have the insecure mindset of captivity, came on the scene. It was now time for God to raise up a new leader for a new generation.

When the time was right, God sent a new type of leader to Palestine. Upon his arrival, the intimidation by those opposing their work was so bad that Nehemiah had to survey and plan in secret before he launched his appeal to the people. And when the new generation of people caught the vision of his appeal, and was inspired by the strength of Nehemiah's leadership, the challenge brought to life a mind to work. And work they did. Within a year after Nehemiah's arrival, the reconstruction of the city was completed.

Where are the Nehemiahs among us who have the strength to lead the church off pews and into the hedges and highways? Where is the leadership that is necessary to bring to life a "mind to work" that lies within the heart of every believer? Leadership means that some individuals must be willing to take the blows from Satan in order to do that which is right. Leadership means that there must be those who can risk standing above the norm in order to bring out of those who maintain the norm, a mind to work, and thus launch a restoration to what it was when we came out of captivity.

There is always chaos produced when norms are changed. Paradigm shifts in society come with great pain. Nevertheless, **leadership is identified by the ability to survey the needs, determine that which must be done, and then call on those who maintain the norm to break into a new paradigm.** Those leaders who are insecure cannot do this. Their insecurity is always soothed by fitting in with the established culture of the majority. We might say that the insecure can never lead God's people to where God wants them to be simply because their faith is in the type of leadership that is demanded by the masses, not in their conviction to follow God's desires at all cost. They are thus leaders who are called by churches that seek preachers who will scratch their itching ears.

**True Leadership  
Must Be Willing  
To Take The Blows  
From A  
Lethargic  
Opposition.**

We must remember that insecure leadership will never complete the job. It takes leadership that knows how to mourn, pray and fast over the ruins of the city. These leaders can inspire people to have a mind to work. Unfortunately, the leaders who are produced by a lethargic church culture cannot get the job done. It often takes an imported leader as Moses or Paul to get the people off the benches and into the work.

I do not know where Nehemiah gained his sense of confidence. It could possibly be the result of the situation he was in while still in Babylon. He was “*in Shushan the palace*” (Ne 1:1). It was over eighty years since Cyrus came to the throne of the Medo-Persian Empire and made the decree to send the first captives back to their homelands. Nehemiah, therefore, was born into and grew up as a free man in Babylon. He grew up in a palace culture which evidently instilled within him a culture of confidence. Though a Jew in the land of Gentiles, he grew up a free man. His mind was free from the “bondage mentality” of his forefathers. His thinking had not been molded by the indifferent culture of the Judean people who had ceased rebuilding the city.

Nehemiah represented a new generation of leadership. He was not a captive in Babylon. He grew up when the apartheid of Jewish slaves was over in Babylon. He was a full citizen of society, and thus had the opportunity of having the prominent work as a cupbearer for the king of Babylon (Ne 2:1). He was simply a free Jew living in a prominent place in Shushan.

Nehemiah was the new “postmodern” Jew with a vision for greater things. Many years before, the fathers of Israel had already returned to Judah with Zerubabel. Their leadership at least took Nehemiah’s fathers back to the land. Though that generation of leadership accomplished some good things, they failed to rebuild completely the city of Jerusalem. They continued to suffer with the complexes of the captives. They were insecure. They were men who found it difficult to dream, have visions of great things, and lead against the consensus of their captors.

<p><b>It Takes Unique Leadership To Lead Against The Norm Of The Group.</b></p>
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Nehemiah's generation of leadership, however, was quite different. They grew up in a time when a Jew was no longer a captive in Babylonian territory. In fact, the deliverance of the Jews in Babylonia during the days of Esther advanced the Jews to prominence throughout the Babylonian Empire. Nehemiah's generation, therefore, was a people with confidence. They were people who could think for themselves. They grew up in a situation where freedom allowed them to make and accomplish goals. And so, God waited for Nehemiah's generation of leadership to arise before He called a leader who could overcome great opposition in order to accomplish the final rebuilding of the mother city, Jerusalem. The time was right for a man as Nehemiah.

**Without Vision  
No Person  
Can Lead.**

The problem with culturally prepared leadership is that the leadership is always loaded with the baggage of the culture. This is both good and bad. It is bad in the sense that "captivity cultures" bring forth insecure leadership. However, it is good when the bells of freedom ring. Cultural changes will then produce a more confident leadership. Free people can think freely, dream to the limit, and have a mind to work for their dreams. **The nature of man – "nothing will be withheld from them which they determine to do" – can be realized only in a culture of freedom.** And now we understand why Jesus brought us freedom from the bondage of legalistic religiosity. When we are free indeed, then indeed we can dream and work. Only truly free people can bring to the surface their mind to work. Only truly free people can break the bondage of lethargy and rebuild the city. Truly free churches develop Nehemiahs. This is thus a great thing for churches that break free from a culture of legalism and political religious bondage. They can truly produce a new secure leadership that can take disciples out of stagnation into an era of growth. When men's minds are set free, they have an opportunity to excel in all things to the glory of God.

**A Culture  
Of Freedom  
Trains Leadership  
That Can  
Freely Think.**

This new leadership will take disciples back to work. It will no longer be satisfied with sitting

idly as spectators listening to sages from the stages. It is a leadership that will lead people to hands-on involvement. It is a leadership that will lead from the front with a sword in one hand and a working instrument in the other. It will not focus on endless “business meetings” of discussions of the old days and what we should be doing. The business meetings will be gone as a course of personally involved workers drown out the voices of those who said it could never be done. We thus call for those Nehemiahs among us who will bring out of us a mind to work.

### Chapter 3

## **THE EVIDENCE OF GOOD WORKS**

Jesus came into the world to work in order that we believe. Because we believe in response to His work, we work. No one can assume that he believes that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God, therefore, unless he manifests his belief by working in response to God’s grace through Jesus. In our relationship with God, work is always the evidence of our belief. That was James’ proposition of James 2:14-26. In the Christian faith, no one can claim belief without a life of good deeds. Let’s see if that was what was manifested in the life of Jesus who gave us an example of behavior.

Evidential works give witness to the one from which the work originates. By “evidential” I mean that the works are the proof of both origin and inner nature. The works of Jesus gave evidence to His origin. The benevolent works He did gave evidence to His nature, or character. This principle is true in reference to the Christian life. Our works are evidence of the One from whom we come. We are sent forth from Jesus. Our works are also the evidence of our nature. We are born again, and our new birth is evidenced by the works we do.

## A. Jesus gave evidence of His origin.

Jesus came down from an environment of the supernatural. He was not of this world, and for this reason, incarnation was necessary in order to bring Him into the environment of those He sought to save (Ph 2:5-8). Before the incarnation, Jesus was spirit as God (Jn 4:24). He thus had to be incarnate into the flesh of man in order to be among those He created (Jn 1:1,14). However, in order to prove that He was originally not of this world, evidence of His preexistence and Deity had to be given.

Jesus could not simply state that He was Deity unless there was evidence of the fact from the origin from which He came. A claim to the fact of Deity, without evidence, would only lead us to conclude that Jesus was simply a lunatic, a master deceiver. Therefore, the evidence of His supernatural origin had to be something from the environment from which He came. If He came from a heavenly environment, then we would want from Him a taste of heaven. And thus, He brought the work of His native environment into a world that was confined to physical laws. His miraculous works, therefore, were not simply for benevolent purposes. They were evidences to confirm who He was, and from where He came. Jesus' miraculous work was necessary for us to believe who He was.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Jesus Had To Prove Who He Was.</b></p>
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Now keep in mind that the evidence of Jesus' nature and origin was miraculous simply because of who He was and from where He came. He was not ordinary in origin as man. And thus, we would not expect the evidence of who He was to be ordinary. As we journey through the principle that one's works prove his origin and nature, we must not write off the evidential nature of our works because they are not miraculous as Jesus' works. Jesus' benevolent work was healing a crippled arm or leg. Our benevolent work is to feed those who cannot feed themselves. We would not be so arrogant as to seek to copy Jesus' miraculous works. His works stand unique in the fact that He was and is the only begotten Son of God, and as such, He had to prove through His works that He was who He claimed to be (Jn 3;2). Nevertheless, **the principle of**

**evidential good works stands true regardless of the nature of the works that are worked.**

## **B. Light is manifested through work.**

Jesus stated a principle in Matthew 5:16. *“Let your light so shine before men, **that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.**”* In order that His Father be glorified, Jesus had to do the work of His Father. He was the light of the world because He did the work of the environment from which He came (Jn 8:12). However, in order for us to see the light in Him, He had to manifest in an open miraculous manner the light from which He came. That light was manifested in the very works that He did.

The purpose of His works opens the door for understanding why it is necessary that His disciples manifest good deeds in order for them to manifest the light that is in them. They must manifest that light through works. No disciple of Jesus can say he has the light unless others can see that light in his life. The nature of light is that it can be seen. If it cannot, then there is no light. It is only darkness. And so, a “Christian” who claims to be such without the light of good deeds is truly hypocritical. He has simply hijacked the name without the evidence of good works that prove his claim

<p><b>Work Is A Light That Shines In The Darkness.</b></p>
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This is the inseparable relationship between who one claims to be Christian and the light (good works) that manifests that he is a Christian. Jesus made a claim of Deity. We make the claim of being Christian. He manifested the light of God through the miraculous works He did (See 1 Jn 1:1-3). We manifest who we are by what we do, that is, letting our light (works) shine before men. As we would certainly judge Jesus an arrogant fake if He had manifested no miraculous works, so others will judge us arrogant fakes if we do not manifest the light of Jesus in us through our good works.

### C. Jesus came to do the work of God.

This brings us to the ministry of Jesus, to the work He had to accomplish. His primary mission was to be the atoning sacrifice for man. However, in order for Him to accomplish this mission, He had to prove to the world that He was who He said He was, that is, the only begotten Son of God (Jn 3:16). And in order to prove this claim, He had to do the works of the One who sent Him.

The primary book in the New Testament that was written with the theme of giving us evidence that Jesus was the Christ and Son of God, is the book of John. The theme of John's witness to the deity of Jesus was the works that He did. John wrote that we might believe that Jesus was the Christ and Son of God (Jn 20:30,31). In order to prove his proposition, John focused on that which would prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus did not originate from this earthly environment of physical laws. Jesus did the work of God, and thus John recorded that which He did. And in doing so, he proved that Jesus was the Christ and Son of God.

In order to identify the deity of Jesus, both Jesus and John used the word *ergon* (work), the common word of the day that expressed something that one does which can be witnessed by others. Jesus was willing to rest His case on the fact that the work (*ergon*) that He did would prove that He was from God. In one of His initial confrontations with the religious leaders concerning the works He did, Jesus said, "*But I have greater witness than that of John. For the works that the Father has given Me to accomplish – the very works that I do – bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me*" (Jn 5:36).

John the Baptist certainly did a great work. However, he worked no miracles. The fact that Jesus did miraculous work gave witness to the fact that He was from God. Jesus' miracles, therefore, were not worked in order to satisfy the idle curiosity of men, but to confirm that He came from the Father. The witness of the works was that He came from the Father.

As Jesus had instructed the righteous to let their good works shine before unbelievers (Mt 5:16), so did He. It was only natural that Jesus work in order that the Father in heaven be glorified. And thus, we learn the true purpose for good works. Jesus accused the religious leaders, “*But all their works they do to be seen by men*” (Mt 23:5). There is a difference in working in order to be seen by men and working in order to give glory to God. Good works are necessary to manifest our origin. But good works are not for the purpose of bringing glory to ourselves, or even the church, since we are the church. We let our light shine (good works) in order that the Father be glorified as Jesus worked in order to give glory to the Father. Works that are done out of a motive for self-recognition lose their shine.

**Good Works  
Are For  
The Glory Of God.**

#### **D. The disciples realized that they must work.**

The disciples of Jesus realized soon into Jesus’ ministry that doing the work of God was necessary. “*What shall we do,*” they asked Jesus, “*so that we might work the works of God?*” (Jn 6:28). Every disciple of Jesus must ask this question. Those who do not, have no right to plagiarize the name “Christian.” How can one claim to be of Christ when he or she does not want to do the work of God?

**Belief  
Must Produce  
Work.**

Jesus answered the disciples’ question by stating the purpose of all good works. “*This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent*” (Jn 6:29). Belief is the foundation upon which good works are motivated. God worked through Jesus in order to produce a belief in us that would move us to do good works. This establishes the reason why Jesus came to do the work of God. The purpose of His work was salvational in order to produce a community of believers who would go to work for Him. He came to lay the foundation upon which all our good works come forth.

John wrote that Jesus worked that we might believe that He is the

Christ and Son of God (Jn 20:30,31). When John wrote the apologetical words of John 20:30,31, he meant more than mental ascent, more than intellectual knowledge and understanding that Jesus was the Christ and Son of God. **Our belief that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God must move us to work the work of God.** The gospel according to John is written, therefore, to produce good works, for through good works we manifest our belief in Jesus as the Christ and Son of God. This is the work of God, that we work because of our belief.

### E. Belief is manifested by work.

The example of work that Jesus did was for our belief. His work was apologetical (evidential), and in being such, His works have become the foundation of our faith to believe who He said He was.

Jesus was in Jerusalem during one of the Jewish feasts of Dedication. In John 10, it is recorded that some Jews came to Him in order to confront Him concerning who He was. They complained,

**Faith Is Manifested  
By A Life  
Of Good Works.**

*“How long will You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, **tell us plainly**”* (Jn 10:24). The fact was that Jesus had already “told” them who He was. But they were not listening to **how** He “told” them. He answered their complaint, *“I told you and you did not believe. **The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me**”* (Jn 10:25). His “telling” was not in words, but in works. And so it always is. *“Show me your faith without your works, **and I will show you my faith by my works**”* (Jn 2:18). Good works are always the evidence of what God demands in order to prove our faith. There are no shortcuts to prove our faith. There are no words, no good intentions, no statements made. **Belief in Jesus is always manifested through good works in our lives.**

No church business meeting will ever prove the faith of those who attend. Only when disciples report back concerning what they have done will the true disciples of the group be identified. It is for this reason

that “faithfulness” in attendance to church meetings can never be the evidence of discipleship. In order to identify ourselves as disciples, people must see what we do, not our presence alone. By your fruits I will know you. By your light I will know that you are a disciple. If neither of us manifest any good works, then we cannot identify one another as disciples of Jesus.

**Accountability,  
Not Worksheets,  
Prove Discipleship.**

It is because of the preceding fact that one of the greatest theological errors of the centuries was constructed. That error is the theology that attendance to church assemblies manifests “faithfulness.” It is believed that as long as one’s name is checked off the “regular” assembly chart, he or she can be considered “faithful.” We have thus legally soothed our consciences by our perfect attendance records. We have pacified the lazy by allowing them to idly sit on benches and pews in order to listen to our postulations from pulpits.

But consider again the purpose of Jesus’ works. His miraculous works not only told the Jews who He was, the works also told them of the One the works glorified. He came to do the works of the Father, and by doing such, the Father was glorified. It is the same with the disciple. We go forth in our communities in order to let our light shine. But our light (good works) that originates from Jesus gives glory to our Father. Attendance gives no glory to God. Attendance gives us the glory, for everyone considers us faithful when we show up. But if perfect attendance is all that we have to show for our faith, then how is God going to be glorified by our good works?

The Jews did not like Jesus’ answer in John 10 since they rightly concluded what He was saying. Because of His works, they understood His claim that He came from the Father. They subsequently “*took up stones again to stone Him*” (Jn 10:31). And should any disciple of Jesus expect anything less? The very behavior that proves the origin of the disciple will bring on the persecution of those who do not like the light that shines from them (Mt 5:10-12). If there is no persecution in a world of darkness, then we must conclude that our works are not sufficient to

prove who we are. In fact, if there are no stones thrown our way, then there are no works to prove who we are.

Instead of backing down from the Jews' threat, Jesus reminded them again, "*Many good works I have showed you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?*" (Jn 10:32). The Jews clearly understood what Jesus was claiming through His miraculous works. They understood that He was claiming to be from God. They thus answered Jesus, "*For a good work we do not stone You. But for blasphemy, and because You, being a man, **make Yourself God***" (Jn 10:33). They made the right conclusion. Jesus did make Himself God because He worked the works of Him who sent Him. He was willing to base His case on the fact and truth of what He did. "*If I do not do the works of My Father,*" He said, "*do not believe Me*" (Jn 10:37).

**A Claim  
Without Works  
Is A Vain Claim.**

His point was that we must believe in Him because we believe in what He did. If He had not done the works of the Father, then He was just another good teacher, and no more than that. On the other hand, if He truly did what John recorded that He did, then everything changes. Jesus said to the Jews, "*But if I do them [the works], though you do not believe Me, **believe the works so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me and I in Him***" (Jn 10:38). And herein is the apologetic of Jesus' good works. **His works identified Him to be from God.**

There is also apologetical evidence in the good works of the disciple of Jesus. Our good works identify us to be from Him because we believe He is from God. When glory is given to God for what we do, then our light shines for God. **The point is that if there is no shining through good works, then there is no evidence that we are from God.** As good works in the name of Jesus give evidence that one is a Christian, the lack of the same proves that one is not a Christian. Since Jesus would not expect us to believe who He was without the good works from the Father, then certainly **we must not expect others to believe that we are Christians if there are no good works to prove**

**our case.**

It would take only one valid work to ignite the flame of belief in Jesus. Jesus said, “*I have done one work and you all marvel*” (Jn 7:21). Well, yes. John records only seven of Jesus’ miracles, and apologizes that books could have been written of the many works that He did (Jn 21:25). But if it would take only one miracle to prove His sonship, we would assume that His works would be of the nature of His deity. And this is John’s point in John 21:25. His life was a life of the miraculous. “*And Jesus went about all Galilee ... healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people*” (Mt 4:23). What else would we expect from the Son of God? And what else would others expect of us? If we claim to be sons of God by faith, then certainly we must go about with all good works.

<p><b>Others Must Marvel Because Of Our Good Works.</b></p>
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**E. Disciples must finish their course of work.**

There is urgency about moving into action, about getting the job done. Jesus sought to emphasize this point with the disciples during His ministry with them. “*We must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day. The night is coming when no one can work*” (Jn 9:4). When it comes to doing the work of God there is something urgent about getting the job done. Those who truly believe realize this. A truly zealous disciple will always be driven by the thinking that “time is momentary.” We are but a vapor that appears for a moment, and then vanishes away (Js 1:11). And for this reason, the truly grateful to God always feel that they do not have enough time to thank God through good works for their salvation.

At the conclusion of the ministry of Jesus, and while in His final days in Jerusalem, Jesus made some necessary final statements to His disciples. In a personal conversation with the twelve, He said, “*Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I speak not from Myself. **But the Father who***

*dwells in Me, He does the works*” (Jn 14:10). It was as if Jesus wanted to reassure them before they endured the tremendous test of their faith they were about to experience during His trials and crucifixion. He exhorted them to believe. However, in the trials that they were about to experience, He wanted them to focus on the works that He had done in their presence to prove that the Father was in Him. *“Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in me. Otherwise, believe Me for the very works themselves”* (Jn 14:11). Their belief must continue because they had the empirical evidence of personally experiencing the works. It would be that belief, therefore, that would present the opportunity for them to do greater works. Their works would be greater in that they would do more works. *“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also. And greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father”* (Jn 14:12). Jesus did His works during a brief ministry on earth. They had many years to come in their ministries during which they could glorify the Father through works.

<p><b>Others Believe Who We Are Because Of What We Do.</b></p>
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Jesus gave unbelievers the best shot that could ever be given. He did the works of the Father. He gave glory to the Father. And because no one of His immediate audiences could thus plead ignorance, they were without excuse. *“If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would have no sin. But now they have both seen and hated both Me and My Father”* (Jn 15:24). He had clearly manifested who He was. His claim was that His works were sufficient for people to believe on Him. And thus Jesus could finalize His ministry by having accomplished all the work that He was destined to do. *“I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work that You gave Me to do”* (Jn 17:4).

What is interesting about Jesus’ statement of John 17:4 is the past tense that He used in reference to His work. *“I have finished the work ....”* This statement was made **before** the atoning work of the cross. The statement, therefore, must refer to the work of His ministry.

His ministry work – if John 20:30,31 is an explanation of the evidential purpose of His work – was to work in order to evidence the fact that He was the Christ and Son of God. His resurrection was a **declaration** that He was the Son of God. Paul wrote that He was “*declared to be the Son of God ... by the resurrection*” (Rm 1:4). Paul did not say that He was **proved** to be the Son of God by the resurrection. We must conclude with John that His works were sufficient **evidence** of His sonship. We must also conclude with Paul that His resurrection was the **declaration** of the fact of His sonship. By the time of the resurrection, Jesus had already worked the work of the Father to prove His sonship.

<p><b>Our Work Is A Declaration Of Our Discipleship.</b></p>
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I think we can apply the same principle in identifying Christians. The Christian’s good works are a declaration of who he is, that he is a son of God. He is certainly a son of God by obedience to the gospel. However, the works after obedience to the gospel are a declaration of the fact. This is the principle behind Jesus’ statement of Matthew 7:17-20.

*Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit, but a bad tree brings forth bad fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that does not bring forth good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore, by their fruits you will know them.*

Christians are the good trees. “*Therefore, by their fruits you will know them.*” I think Jesus’ point is clear. The only way I can know that you are a disciple is by your good fruit. For those who wear the name “Christian,” but have not the fruit, are really not who they say they are.

I understand that the historical context of Matthew 7 is the ministry of Jesus to the Jewish nation in view of the A.D. 70 conclusion of that nation. The bad trees would all be removed in the destruction of national Israel in A.D. 70. But if A.D. 70 is any illustration of the final judgment, all fruitless trees will be removed. There is no hope for a fruitless disciple.

Unbelievers will often bring persecution against the disciples of Jesus because of the disciples' continuous witness in their presence of the good works that prove that Jesus is their king. A disciple may be silenced in speaking the name of Jesus in his community. However, good works keep preaching even though one may not be able to speak one word of the gospel. Could this be the background of Peter's statement in 1 Peter 3:15? *"But sanctify Christ as Lord God in your hearts and be ready always to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear."*

**Works Preach  
The Nature Of God  
That Is In Us.**

In a hostile environment of unbelievers one may not be able to speak. But unbelievers will rarely stop one from doing good works. And if the curiosity of the unbeliever is aroused, then there can be the opportunity to explain the origin of the light that is shining from the working disciple. Our problem may be that no one is asking concerning the hope that is in us. They are not asking because there is no work that stimulates the questions. If no one has ever asked you concerning the hope that is in you, then I would certainly be alerted to the fact that no light is shining through any good works.

Would it be possible for each one of us to lay down his or her head on the pillow of death and say that we finished the work that God has given each of us to do? Our belief must move us to work the work of God until death terminates our labor in the vineyard. Can we say at the final hour of our life that we gave it our best shot? Can we say, *"I have fought the good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith"* (2 Tm 4:7)? If not, then it is a time for repentance in order to do the first works. In order to "keep the faith," we must work the faith.

## Chapter 4

**PARABLES ON WORK**

How many times have you heard this or that excuse why someone would not help in doing a particular work? Jesus even left a specific parable for us to let us know that this is not a new problem. In the parable of the great banquet, those who were invited “*all with one accord began to make excuse*” (Lk 14:18). One said, “*I have bought a piece of ground,*” and another said that he had “*bought five yoke of oxen*” (Lk 14:18,19). You know the rest of the story. When it comes to Jesus’ invitation to discipleship, the excuses are without end.

Some excuses to avoid involvement are valid. They would thus not be excuses, but reasons. But what James stated in James 4:17 is still true. “*Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.*” With that caution, we would do well to be careful about making excuses, or giving reasons that are really excuses.

Excuses are made only when work is involved. We make no excuses about doing our own thing. We make excuses in order to do our own thing instead of fulfilling our responsibility toward others. Jesus focused on this problem in defining the nature of the kingdom. He gave a trilogy of parables that are recorded in Matthew 25 in order to define the work ethic that should be indicative of His disciples. Each of the three parables bring us to the same conclusion. That conclusion is that if one would be a disciple of Jesus, **self-initiated works must be a life-style, not an occasional occurrence in our lives.** The conclusion of the parables teaches that Christians should be very careful about making excuses to avoid responsibility.

**Excuses Are Manifestations Of Resistance to Work.**

It is surprising to notice that the nature of many of the parables of Jesus is on the activity of the characters in the parables. Jesus seeks to focus our minds on work, involvement, and being busy with kingdom

business. As we survey through the three parables of Matthew 25, please notice carefully the emphasis Jesus places on doing the work of the kingdom as an absolute life-style for the justified.

### A. The absent-minded virgins (Mt 25:1-13):

The three parables of Matthew 25 are scary, since all three are stated in the context of a final end of national Israel. Since Jesus takes the illustration of the parables beyond the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (Mt 25:46), the point of all three parables is applicable to Christians until He comes again in His final coming. A.D. 70 was judgment for those who were not prepared for the end of national Israel. The end of time or our death will be final judgment for all the living who are not prepared for the coming of Jesus.

The first parable of the trilogy is commonly entitled the parable of the Virgins. Spare me the necessity of going into all the details of the parable. I think we need to look at the parable from the viewpoint of the general theme of all three parables. I would say the theme is “watch and work in preparation for the end of life or coming of the Lord.” In this first parable, reference is to some foolish virgins who were in their attitudes and life-styles indifferent to impending opportunity.

*Then will the kingdom of heaven be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them. But the wise took oil in their jars with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, “Behold, the bridegroom! Go out to meet him.” Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, “Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.” But the wise answered, saying, “No, lest there not be enough for us and you. But go instead to those who sell and buy for yourselves.” And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came. And they who were ready went in with him to the marriage. And the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, “Lord, Lord, open to us!” But he answered and said, “Truly I say to you, I do not know you.” Therefore, watch for you know neither the day nor the hour.*

**1. *The wise and the foolish among us:*** The kingdom is made up of both wise and foolish disciples. All ten virgins took the initiative to go out with lamps to meet the Bridegroom (25:1). The five foolish did take their lamps with a little oil in them by which they would burn for a short period of time. They were ready for action, prepared to let their “gospel light shine.” They began to build their barns and rebuild the city. But they

**The Kingdom Is  
Not Without  
Foolish Disciples.**

were foolish, not because they failed to take their lamps and a little oil, but because they did not go out for the long haul. Because they took no extra oil in jars, they did not foresee the possible delay that the wise virgins did (25:3). Their lack of foresight and unawareness in attitude were not revealed until the final hour. The character of who they were led them to cease from accomplishing their destiny. They were foolish because they did not prepare.

**2. *Lights go out when the fuel is exhausted:*** Why was it that the wise were prepared for the long haul, but the foolish were indifferent, and thus, were not prepared at all times for the coming Bridegroom? We must keep in mind that the Holy Spirit uses the word “foolish” to define those who cannot think beyond their immediate experiences. One is foolish when he or she does not understand the perseverance that is necessary for the working disciple. Foolish disciples are not alert. The gravity of coming opportunity is not strong within their character, and thus they take no extra oil. It will be truly unfortunate when the opportunity comes and foolish disciples find that their lamps have run dry. As opportunity passes by, their lights flicker and die.

Jesus concluded the parable by stating, “*Watch, for you know neither the day nor the hour*” (25:13). “Watch” means staying in a state of preparedness. Because the wise virgins had the extra oil meant that they were always ready. They were “watching” in that they were prepared with extra oil. What takes place before the coming of the Bridegroom is the emphasis of the parable. The coming was a onetime event. The unpreparedness was a demeanor of life. What Jesus is saying is that it is foolish to think that one is prepared for Jesus when his or her

Christianity is running out of fuel. How can one assume he is a “wise” disciple if he has no extra oil?

**Sleeping Churches  
Are Not Alert Enough  
To Know That  
They Are Sleeping.**

**3. *Lamps without oil:*** The foolish did not bring extra oil. They had only the oil that was in their lamps. They started the building of the barns with a little oil, but they did not have sufficient energy, funds, desires, or commitment to complete the task. They had the dream of rebuilding the temple and city, but the opposition was too great. Their leadership could not think beyond their personal encounters. Their dreams lasted only until their willingness to work was exhausted. When the honeymoon was over, opportunity was lost. The fire went out because of a lack of vision and an inability to understand that discipleship is a lifetime commitment.

The fact that they took no extra oil is a reflection on who they were. Jesus defined them as “foolish” simply because of their indifference concerning the preparedness that must be characteristic of His disciples. And because they were indifferent, it was extremely difficult to alert them to their responsibility to be watchful.

**4. *Taker discipleship:*** People who find themselves in trouble usually never discover that what got them in trouble in the first place was their own fault. When people are self-centered, they are headed for trouble. And when in trouble, they look for deliverance only when it is too late. Self-centered people are always victims of themselves.

The foolish who said, “Give us oil,” were really focusing on themselves. So much so, that they were willing to endanger the five wise virgins by also exhausting the oil of their lamps. Why do the desperate always want to take others down with them? Is it because selfishness got them in trouble in the first place, and thus, they can think no other way? After all, the foolish did not say to the wise, “You go on. We will assume the consequences of our own laziness.”

The foolish virgins were “taker disciples.” They were inward focused at a time when they should have been repenting. The foolish are the people who would say, “Give us a good sermon.” “Give us an excit-

ing worship experience.” “Give us comfortable pews, great speakers, and the right climate.” “Give us the preachers for the church and the lost can take their chances.” “Give us ....” “Give us ....” Sociologists identify the current generation as the “me” generation. Everything is about me, so much so, that even the public assembly of churches must focus on “what I get out of it.” The foolish virgins would be comfortable today. Instead of worship that is given to God from an outpouring heart, they would be sitting in assemblies across the land saying, “Give us a good sermon or a good worship experience.” To the organizers of the “worship experience,” the foolish virgins would also say, “What program can you give me in order to entice me to come back next week.”

<p><b>In Worship Something Is Given, Not Taken.</b></p>
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Have I gone too far in understanding the culture of the foolish virgins? You be the judge. I do know that when the time came when they should have been repenting over their foolishness, they were thinking selfishly, having no worry about endangering others for the sake of preserving their own selves.

**5. Cries from the unknown:** So did the wise give oil to the foolish? They did not because they could not (25:9). I cannot receive the Bridegroom on the foundation of your preparedness. Neither can I take you there because of my work. No unfaithful husband will ever see Jesus on the basis of the work of his faithful wife. It won’t happen. The only thing left for foolish disciples to say is, “Lord, Lord, open to us!” (25:11). And the only words they will hear in response from the Lord is, “*I do not know you*” (25:12). I would conclude from these words **that the Lord does not know indifferent disciples**. If the world cannot know us by our work, then certainly Jesus does not know us.

The Bridegroom responded to the cries of the foolish, “*I do not know you.*” If there is no light from the oil in your lamp, you are not known by Jesus. When our light goes out, we are out of opportunities. The wisdom of the wise virgins was manifested in the fact that they **never wanted their lights to go out**. They thus took no chances.

They remained in a state of preparedness. And that is discipleship.

**6. The unknown hour:** What if we knew for sure that Jesus was coming tomorrow? What would we do today? Where would we go? Who would we see? What words would we say to others? From whom would we seek forgiveness? To whom would we give forgiveness? What would characterize our behavior at work? The fact is that if we knew that Jesus was coming tomorrow, many things in our lives would probably change for the better today.

But we do not know the hour of His coming. Foolish disciples, therefore, will put His coming out of their minds. Wise disciples will live as if He might come at any hour. That is the difference between being a foolish disciple and a wise disciple. The point is that the behavior of our lives determines whether we are foolish or wise.

## **B. Dig-and-hide disciples (Mt 25:14-30):**

Do I need to remind you of the context of this parable that immediately follows the parable of the virgins? We are headed in the context of Matthew 25 to the statement, “*These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life*” (Mt 25:46). Along the way Jesus is throwing in His last parables, all of which focus on life behavior as a follower of God. This second parable of the trilogy of parables of Matthew 25 takes away our excuses that surround complaints about our abilities.

*For it [the kingdom] is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own bondservants and delivered to them his goods. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to everyone according to his own ability. And immediately he went on his journey. Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with the same **and made another five talents**. And likewise he who had received two **gained two more**. But he who had receive one **went and dug in the earth and hid his master’s money**. After a long time the master of those bondservants came and settled accounts with them. And so he who had received five talents came and brought five more talents, saying, “Master, you delivered to me five tal-*

ents. Behold, I have gained beside them five more talents.” His master said to him, **“Well done, good and faithful bondservant. You were faithful over a few things. I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your master.”** He also who had received two talents came and said, “Lord, you delivered to me two talents. Behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.” His master said to him, **“Well done, good and faithful bondservant. You were faithful over a few things. I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.”** Then he who had received the one talent came and said, “Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And **I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the earth.** See, here you have what is yours.” His master answered and said to him, **“You wicked and lazy bondservant. You knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I have scattered no seed. Therefore, you should have put my money in the bank, and then at my coming I would have received my own with interest. Therefore, take the talent from him and give it to him who has ten talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance. But from him who does not have, even what he does have will be taken away. Cast the unprofitable bondservant into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”**

**1. Delivery of responsibility:** The bondservants were given responsibility (25:14). It was not that some were left out. The master delivered some of his goods to all of them. One received five, another two, and another one. The point is, no one was ignored in the distribution. Not everyone received the same, neither was anyone left with nothing. And so, no excuse can be made as, “I can’t do anything.”

**Because We Have  
Been Given To,  
Assumes That  
We Must Be Doing  
Something For Others.**

The disciple who says he cannot do anything has not taken the time to see what he has. God never left anyone out when it came to the distribution of abilities. To say that we can do nothing is to deny the distribution of God. It is to say that God made us inept and with inadequacies. **The fact is that God could never require us to be accountable if we had no ability to work His accounts.** If one would, therefore, “go away into eternal punishment” (Mt 25:46) without having anything for which to be accountable, then God would be a fiendish

and unjust God. How could He require anything from someone to whom He gave nothing?

We know that there will be those who “*go away into eternal punishment.*” Since we know that this will happen, then we need to get busy and discover our responsibilities. We need to first find our talents. And then, we need to be productive with what we have.

**2. Productive servants:** The five and two talent bondservants went to work. They assumed their responsibility with what they had, and thus, they were productive (25:16-17). God expects productivity. The central theme of this parable is productivity, regardless of our individual abilities. God can justly send the unproductive into eternal punishment because He has given every person the goods with which to be productive.

We must not forget that the trilogy of parables is about assuming responsibility. This parable is defining the productivity of the ones who have been given responsibility. By the time Jesus gets to the third parable, He will be more specific in what to do in maintaining good works. One of the key points in this parable is to recognize that every disciple has been given responsibility and that which is necessary to produce. If production does not happen, then the unproductive will go away into everlasting punishment (25:46).

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>In Productivity We Avoid Punishment.</b></p>
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**3. Dig-and-hide theology:** The unproductive carry shovels and dig holes. They hide their abilities and their opportunities (25:18). A dig-and-hide theology has cursed us to the point that we have convinced ourselves that lethargy is the norm and productivity is the exception. The church is burdened with dig-and-hide members who believe that there will not be a time of accountability at which we will be judged by our works (2 Co 5:10).

When the five and two talent bondservants gave account of their responsibility, they had **gained** more. By doing such they were “*good and faithful*” bondservants (25:21,23). Therefore, we would define “good and faithful” to mean the implementation of good work. No one is “good and faithful” if his or her life is not defined by productivity. Are

we to understand from this that Jesus would not consider us “good and faithful” if we are not productive with what we have been given by God? Certainly! There is no true disciple of Jesus who believes and practices a dig-and-hide theology.

**The Little We Have  
Must Always  
Become More.**

**4. The fear factor:** Fear drove the dig-and-hide disciple to be unproductive (25:25). He was afraid of failure. In his fear of failure he failed. Because he hid what was given to him, he was “*wicked and lazy*” (25:26). Harsh words? Exactly. Please keep them in mind when determining if you are a disciple of Jesus. Becoming a disciple of Jesus means that one must depend on Him to be adequate in all things. “I-can-

**Fear Manifests  
A Failure  
To Depend  
On Jesus.**

do-all-things-through-Christ-who-strengthens-me” means just that (See Ph 4:13). If I feel inadequate, I will fear and hide. My fear, therefore, manifests my dependence on myself and not Jesus. And if I am depending on myself to perform my responsibilities,

how can I claim to be the type of disciple Jesus wants me to be?

John said that perfect love casts out fear (1 Jn 4:17,18). In fact, “*he who fears is not made perfect in love*” (1 Jn 4:18). What is John saying? Simply that our love must move us to overcome all that would hinder us from doing what God requires of us. It was not that the one-talent man failed to recognize his talent. He knew what he had. He also knew that he must be productive. However, his fear moved him to be indifferent concerning the desire of the master. His eventual rejection by his master was based on his attitude, for his attitude led him to dig-and-hide. This is John’s point in reference to love.

The disciple of Jesus is stirred into action because of love behind him and in front of him. John said, “*We love because He first loved us*” (1 Jn 4:19). That is love behind us. Peter and other inspired writers said, “*Love the brotherhood*” (1 Pt 2:17). That is love set before us. If there is no work to manifest either our love for Jesus or our love for our brothers, then love does not exist. Works manifest our love for our brothers. No works, no love. If one has no good works, therefore, how can

he assume that he should “*go away into eternal life*” (25:46)?

The end of the unprofitable servant is, “*Cast the unprofitable bondservant into outer darkness*” (25:30). No deductive interpretation skills are needed to understand this. Lazy Christians will be cast out. They will be cast out because the inactivity of their lives has manifested that their character is inappropriate for cohabitation with others for eternity. The trilogy of Jesus’ parables in reference to rejection from him defines the purpose of good works. Good works refer to a relationship between people. They manifest that a giving relationship exists. Therefore, if no giving and sharing relationship exists, then a self-centered attitude is revealed. We thus know one’s attitude by the evidence of his or her works. And if there are no good works, no fruit, then one has judged himself. We thus judge ourselves by our lack of action to work for Jesus. See if this is not brought out in the last parable of the trilogy. Keep in mind that one’s heart is manifested by what he or she does.

**Dig-and-Hide Disciples  
Lack Love.**

### **C. Responding to the needs of humanity (Mt 25:31-46):**

The last parable of the trilogy of Matthew 25 is again focused on good works. In fact, in this parable Jesus becomes more specific. In the parable of the virgins, the subject was generic. In view of the coming Bridegroom, we must continually live a life of watchfulness. In the parable of the talents, the generic becomes more definite. Specific responsibilities are handed out. From these, performance in good works must come forth. In this parable, Jesus identifies the specific needs to which our good works must be directed. They must be directed toward the naked, hungry, strangers, thirsty and imprisoned. The generic has thus moved to the specific, and now Jesus’ focus is on our individual relationship with the needs of humanity.

**Good Works  
Manifest  
A Heart Of Love.**

*When the Son of Man will come in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. And before Him will be gathered all nations. **And He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.** And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and **you gave Me food.** I was thirsty and **you gave Me drink.** I was a stranger and **you took Me in.** I was naked and **you clothed Me.** I was sick and **you visited Me.** I was in prison and **you came to Me.**" Then will the righteous answer Him, saying, "Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked, and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?" And the King will answer and say to them, "Truly I say to you, **inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brothers, you have done it to Me.**" Then He will say also to those on the left hand. "**Depart from Me you cursed** into everlasting fire that is prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and **you gave Me no food.** I was thirsty and **you gave Me no drink.** I was a stranger and **you did not take Me in.** I was naked and **you did not clothe Me;** sick and in prison, and **you did not visit Me.**" Then they will also answer, saying, "Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to You?" Then He will answer them, saying, "Truly I say to you, **inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me. And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.**"*

**1. The sheep group:** This parable speaks of a specific time of accountability for our works (25:31,32). It is a time of separating the sheep (workers) from the goats (the lazy and unproductive). **Our performance as a disciple will determine which group we are in.** Those in the sheep group worked. The verbs of the narrative define their lifestyle. They "gave Me food ... gave Me drink .... took Me in ... clothed Me ... visited Me ... came to Me ..." (25:35,36). They worked. There was no wicked and lazy among this group. **The group was identified, not by what God had done for them, but what they did for others.** Their relationship with others made it possible for them to know the needs of others. Their love moved them into action.

**2. The goat group:** Now this is a different group. It is the dig-and-hide group of those who are not prepared. They do not watch. These are those to whom he said, “*Depart from Me you cursed into everlasting fire.*” He also said to them, “*You gave Me no food ... you gave Me no drink ... you did not take Me in ... you did not clothe Me ... you did not visit Me ...*” (25:41-43). No work, no reward. “*And these will go away into eternal punishment*” (25:46). Again, we are in the goat group because of our lack of response to the needs of others.

**Our Response  
To The Needs  
Of Others Identifies  
Us To Be Sheep.**

There is only one thing that determines if one is in the goat group or the sheep group. **It is our proactive response to the needs of others.** We can systematically argue or discuss our way out of each point

**Goats Are  
Defined By What  
They Do Not Do.**

that Jesus makes. However, when all the classroom chatter is over, we must get out of class and go find someone we can help. This context is not talking simply about those needs that may arise. It is obvious that disciples serve daily as needs arise. But there is more to our responsibility as disciples. This is an indictment against those who took no initiative to get busy with initiated work to fulfill the needs of the hurting. Those who will go away into eternal punishment simply ignored needs. And thus, their indifference disqualified them from reward.

If we had only this one chapter of inspired Scripture from God, we would have enough Scripture that would shock us into action. The conclusion to this trilogy of parables is frightening if we fall into the goat group of disciples who have created a religion after their own comfort and inactivity. In these parables, Jesus defined the nature of discipleship. That nature is work and productivity. The sheep group cares and works out of a heart of love for God by serving others. If we miss this point, we will miss out on the eternal life that God has to offer those who are justified by good works. Is imperative, therefore, that we get to work for Jesus.

## D. Taking time for others (Lk 10:30-37):

*A certain man went down from Jerusalem, to Jericho and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down that way **a certain priest**. And when he saw him, **he passed by on the other side**. And likewise **a Levite**, when he was at the place, came and looked at him, **and passed by on the other side**. But **a certain Samaritan**, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, **he had compassion on him**. Then he went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. And he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. Now on the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the host, and said to him, "Take care of him. And what more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you." Now which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?*

This has always been a penetrating parable. Three characters are used by Jesus to illustrate three responses to the needs of humanity.

**1. The response of the professional:** All priests of Israel were of the tribe of Levi. Priests were given specific religious responsibilities. When they ministered their responsibilities, they were "fulltime" for the Lord. In the parable, the priest was certainly carrying out his responsibilities. He was headed somewhere that demanded urgent arrival. There was no time for delay. His ceremonial responsibilities were more important to him at the time than the needs he bypassed on the way to his appointment. Jesus was not critical of his dedication to perform his duties. The dedication of the priest is not what is under consideration. His problem was that he became so religiously oriented with his duties that he missed being religious after the nature of God. Now this challenges our understanding of what is expected of us as God's children. What truly makes one religious before God?

James helps answer our question. "*Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this, [1] to take care of the orphans and widows in their affliction, and [2] to keep oneself unspotted from the world*" (Jas 1:27). The first responsibility of the religious is

outward focused. We have a responsibility to others, orphans and widows and unfortunate people left by the roadside who were beaten and robbed by thieves. Secondly, we have a responsibility toward ourselves that we not sin and thus reap the whirlwind. I am sure the priest scored high on condition number two. However, he may have had trouble with number one. He saw a need, but took measures to avoid the situation.

**Christianity Is An  
Engagement Of  
The Needs  
Of Humanity.**

I think the priest missed the point of being that which is pleasing to God. Christianity is everyday. It is responding to immediate needs. And yes, these are the needs that “may arise.” It seems that the priest was not willing to even meet these needs. Life is an encounter with the needs of humanity. And thus, Christianity is to be the same, a behavior that engages the needs of humanity that we experience every day.

**2. *The response of the culturally cocooned:*** As previously stated, all priests came from the tribe of Levi, which tribe God chose out of Israel to be the priestly tribe. They were set aside to be a class of their own and the other tribes were to minister to their needs. They were to be treated differently than the other tribes. I wonder if this did not go to their head? Could it be that the Levites were a little highminded in their cultural position in reference to the rest of Israel? If so, then we can understand why it was difficult for the Levite to stop and help.

Jesus mentioned that the Levite “came and looked at” the person who was wounded and robbed. The priest simply walked on the other side of the road. But the cold-hearted Levite investigated the situation, and then passed on. Can one become so accustomed to needs that he becomes cold and indifferent?

**3. *The response of common people:*** The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, considering them an outcast crossbreed of people who were not pure Jewish in genes and heritage (See Jn 4:9). It is interesting that Jesus used a Samaritan to illustrate his point in answer to the question in the context, “Who is my neighbor?”

The difference between the fulltime religious worker and the cultur-

ally cocooned and the Samaritan was that the Samaritan saw a need, had mercy and acted. His response was not a onetime action, but a behavior of life in that he told the inn keeper that he would cover all the bills.

The parable was given in response to the question of a lawyer who asked, “Who is my neighbor?” (Lk 10:29). Jesus’ question to the lawyer was, “*Now which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among thieves?*” (Lk 10:36). The lawyer had no recourse but to answer correctly. “*He who showed mercy toward him*” (Lk 10:37). Jesus’ response to the lawyer’s correct answer was specific. “*Go and do likewise*” (Lk 10:37). At the end of the story, we must do something. Religious ceremonies and services may be exciting and important. But what God requires of His people is that they “go and do likewise.” This is Christianity. If there is no “doing likewise,” then there is no Christianity.

## Chapter 5

# **LAZINESS GETS US NOWHERE**

A Norwegian proverb goes, “The lazier the man is, the more he plans to do tomorrow.” It is true that some people remind us of blisters. They do not show up until the work is completed. You may be sitting on the right track. But if you just continue sitting there you will be run over by a train.

The Bible is not gentle toward those who are of a slothful spirit. When studying through some of the exhortations that are spread throughout the Scriptures, we get the distinct impression that God views idleness to be completely opposite to what He expects of His children. It is the industrious spirit that glorifies God among men. And spirits that are contrary to a spirit of industry bring a mockery to the Spirit in us that is supposed to bring glory to God.

## A. The sluggards, slothful and those who slumber:

The old English words that were used in reference to lazy people were very descriptive of those who are challenged in activity. The definition of these words that are used in older English translations of the Scriptures give some very graphic pictures of those who are not prone to work. The following Spirit-inspired passages will define the attitude of the person who is not acceptable to God because of the inactivity of his or her behavior.

**A Lazy Spirit  
Manifests That The  
Spirit Is Not working  
In Our Lives.**

When studying through these passages, one thing is very clear. **People with a lazy spirit are not true children of God. Since good works identify the people of God, the lack of such defines those who are not God's people.** Keep this in mind as you journey through these key passages.

**1. Wrong attitudes profess that one does not know God.** *“To the pure all things are pure. But to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure. Even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess that they know God. **But in works they deny Him, being abominable and disobedient and worthless for any good work**”* (Ti 1:15,16). If evil works deny that one knows God, then certainly good works profess our knowledge of God. The one who is driven by an evil attitude cannot profess God. If this is true – and it is according to Paul – **then good works are necessary in order for one to profess God.** If there are no good works in one's life, therefore, there is no profession of God. In fact, the lack of good works would deny God.

**2. Slumber robs one of success.** *“Give no sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids”* (Pv 6:4). *“A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep – so shall your poverty come on you like a robber, and your need like an armed man”* (Pv 6:10,11; see 24:33,34). If you have a problem arising in the morning, then these

**Good Works  
Profess  
God.**

exhortations by Solomon would be worth memorizing. People who sleep too much are not successful. Poverty is the thief of those who slumber.

**3. *Sluggards need to consult ants.*** “Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest” (Pv 6:6-8). Self-initiative? Do you have it? If one must have a “captain,” “overseer” or “ruler” in order to perform, then there is a lack of self-initiative in one’s spirit. Are you asked to perform, but there is no initiative to carry out the task? “As vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, **so is the sluggard to those who send him**” (Pv 10:26). Someone said, “Too many people itch for what they want but won’t scratch for it.” So do you want to do something, but just

<p><b>There Are No Sluggard Ants.</b></p>
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cannot work up enough energy to get the job done? “The soul of a sluggard desires, and has nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made rich” (Pv 13:4). Or, maybe you have been using every excuse not to perform, and thus have had to turn to begging off the works of others. “The sluggard will not plow because of winter; therefore he will beg during the harvest and have nothing” (Pv 20:4). This passage is similar to Paul’s exhortation in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, “... if anyone is not willing to work, neither let him eat.” As I said before, the Holy Spirit is not easy on lazy people.

**4. *Slothful men are roadblocks to work.*** Have you ever been considered a “thorn in the flesh”? “The way of the slothful man is like a hedge of thorns, but the way of the upright is a highway” (Pv 15:19). Having a difficult time feeding yourself? “A slothful man buries his hand in the bowl, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again” (Pv 19:24). Do you want to put your life in danger? “The desire of the slothful kills him, for his hands refuse to labor” (Pv 21:25). Ever wonder why you are sometimes without food? “Slothfulness casts one into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger” (Pv 19:15). Ever wonder why the weeds grow in your field? “I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man

*devoid of understanding; and there it was, all overgrown with thorns; its surface was covered with nettles; its stone*

**A Leak In The Roof  
Is A Sign Of A Lazy Spirit.**

*wall was broken down” (Pv 24:30). What about the leak in the roof of your house or hut? “Because of laziness the building decays, and through idleness of hands the house leaks” (Ec 10:18). After reading these exhortations from God, would we be wrong to conclude that His people should never be identified by a slothful spirit?*

## **B. The road to recovery:**

Christians are to be identified by their diligent spirit and fervent attitudes in good works. As Jesus was identified by His works, so the same evidence must be the testimony to the true disciple of Jesus. If one finds himself with a slothful, sluggish and slumbering spirit, then it is time for repentance. It is time to revive one’s attitude and change one’s lifestyle.

**1. Repent and turn to good works.** I think it is interesting that the Holy Spirit made good works a signal of repentance. Usually, when we think of repentance we think only of obedience to God’s laws. But I think the Spirit has more in mind. If one repents from doing evil works, then certainly repentance must be manifested in doing good works. Listen to what Paul preached.

*But I preached first to those of Damascus, and also at Jerusalem, and then throughout all the regions of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works appropriate to repentance (At 26:20).*

In repentance one certainly returns to obedience of God’s will. But in this passage, Paul taught **doing good works was what God requires in repentance**. This is the will of God. Now is this contrary to our traditional practices? A sermon is preached. An invitation song is

sung. People walk forward. Prayers are uttered. All is well. Is it? What if the next time someone came forward with a repentant spirit that a list of works to be done was handed to the person in order that he or she “does works appropriate to repentance”? Now let’s see who responds to the invitation.

I believe he was preaching that slothful people must get busy and manifest the glory of God in their lives by doing good works. It was the same message that he stated in 2 Corinthians 7:10. *“For godly sorrow works repentance to salvation that is not to be regretted.”* “Works repentance” means more than sorrowful feelings and rededication to the law of God. Doing good works is involved in repentance. If there are no good works coming forth from the repentant, **then there is no evidence of repentance. The conclusion to Paul’s point is that we cannot know if one repents simply by tears and confession. The truly repentant must get to work.** One cannot say he repents, and then return to what he considers “faithfulness” by sitting on a pew at every called assembly of the saints.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Good Works Manifest A Spirit Of Repentance.</b></p>
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The Ephesian church was meeting in their assemblies, but Jesus called on the church to repent. In this call it is not surprising that they were called to do good works as a manifestation of their repentance. *“Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent **and do the first works** ...”* (Rv 2:5). If they were to repent, then they must return to do good works. Jesus encouraged the church in Thyatira when He said, *“And he who overcomes **and keeps My works** unto the end, to him I will give power over the nations”* (Rv 2:26). I think it is interesting in the context of this exhortation that Jesus **did not say** keep His word. Keeping the word of Jesus is obvious (See Jn 12:48). The exhortation is to keep His **works**. Are these the works that have been prepared for us to do as disciples of Jesus (See Ep 2:10)? Probably so, but more on this in a following chapter.

Now consider the possibility that in salvation, one must repent in obedience to salvational laws. One must simply do what Jesus said in

reference to obeying the gospel by immersion in water for remission of sins (See Mk 16:16; At 2:38; 22:16). But in repentance that precedes obedience to the gospel, one must make a commitment to be a disciple of Jesus. The initial command of Jesus to the apostles was, “*Going, therefore, disciple all the nations ...*” (Mt 28:19). To disciple is to teach how one must behave as a follower of Jesus. And a disciple is a follower of the good works of Jesus. Therefore, when the disciples went forth to preach the word, they also preached something else.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Discipleship Involves Work In Word And Deed.</b></p>
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Paul preached obedience to word and works.

*For I will not dare to speak of any of those things that Christ has not worked through me, to make the Gentiles **obedient to word and deed**, through powerful signs and wonders by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ (Rm 15:18,19).*

Just in case you might miss the point, consider what Paul said in Colossians 3:17. “*And whatever you do **in word or deed**, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*” There is a connection in Scripture between the word of the Lord and the deeds that must accompany obedience to the word. The gospel is communicated through the medium of words, but one cannot stop with obedience to the gospel through baptism (See Rm 6:3-6). The deeds must also follow. **One’s repentance to discipleship means that obedience to the gospel is only the beginning of a life time of good works.** The same argument against the teaching of “faith only salvation” is also true of “baptism only salvation.” As faith without works is dead, so also baptism without works is dead. Please keep in mind what Paul wrote to Timothy,

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, **and instruction in righteousness**, so that the man of God may be complete, **thoroughly equipped for every good work** (2 Tm 3:16,17).*

We now pick up on something in this often quoted passage. Many years ago I would quote the passage in reference to doctrinal matters. I missed the complete point. I missed the good works, the purpose for which all Scripture was inspired. **All Scripture is inspired for the purpose of behavioral changes. The word must move one from evil works to works of righteousness.** The Scriptures must be applied in a manner that equips one to produce good works. It is right to believe that the Scriptures are inspired by God. But that belief is dead if we are not instructed to do right things and every good work. Now I use the Scriptures to correct life-styles and instruction in behavioral changes in order that disciples be equipped to do every good work. I use the Scriptures to produce faith in order to move mountains, with emphasis on **move**.

<p><b>The Scriptures Equip Us To Do Good Works.</b></p>
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**2. Good works get us everywhere:** 1 Peter 3:10-12 is a combination of quotations from Psalm 34:12-16 and Psalm 37:27.

*He who would love life and **see good days**, let him refrain his tongue from evil and his lips that they speak no deceit. Let him turn away from evil and **do good**. Let him seek peace and pursue it. **For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers.** But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.*

After such a statement, we would conclude that it says what it means and means what it says. The one who would see good days must not do the things listed. But notice that in order to see good days, one must **do good**. This is taking an initiative to do something. One cannot simply stop doing evil things. He or she must get busy and do something good. This is why repentance must involve doing “appropriate” good works. When one stops evil works, but does not fill in the vacuum in his life with good works, he will often return to his former evil works. It is for this reason that the repentant must be given tasks to do. If the repentant are not challenged to do good, they will go back to doing evil.

Every church should be as a colony of ants. The nature of an ant is to work for the benefit of the colony. No one tells an individual ant what to do. It is simply the nature of an ant to work. No one has ever seen a lazy ant. We do not even refer to ants as “working” ants. They are just ants, and ants work. Would that such could be said of all Christians. We would not have to say, “He is a ‘hard working’ Christian.” Why can we not simply say, “He is a Christian”? And by identifying one as a Christian, the world concludes that he is hard working. The name “Christian” should be synonymous with hard working.

## Chapter 6

# **THE EVIDENCE OF GOD'S PEOPLE**

In this chapter we journey into the heart of what God requires of His people. We might not like what we discover in this journey. I say this because a norm of indifference now characterizes many of those who have claimed the name “Christian,” and subsequently have settled themselves in for a lukewarm ride to heaven. The content of this chapter may thus be shocking. It may be shocking in reference to where we are now in our life-style as a disciple of Jesus. If we are comfortable where we are, then we need to make this journey. We must continually remind ourselves concerning the cost of discipleship and how that discipleship must be manifested in the world in which we live.

I must confess that this is not an easy book to write. It is not easy simply because I know so many people who have convinced themselves that being a “Christian” does not demand a life of initiated good works. They are good people in the sense that they do no evil things. They do not steal. They do not cheat. They do not behave disorderly. However, the problem is that they do not do anything in the name of Jesus. If this is the definition of lukewarm, and I think it is, then there will be a great surprise in store for these people in the end. I write this chapter, there-

fore, in order to convince readers that Jesus will not settle for lukewarm behavior. He will not settle for good works if they are done only when the “opportunity arises.”

Our lives must be vibrant with initiated good works for Jesus. We must constantly be making plans to do good deeds, and then carrying out

<p><b>Judgment Looms In The Future For The Lukewarm.</b></p>
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those deeds. Our lives must simply be lives of doing good to all men at all times. If we are doing nothing, then repentance to true discipleship means that we must get doing something.

When Jesus comes again, He must find us doing good works that we have planned and initiated. So hang on to your seat. Let's venture into Spirit-inspired territory wherein God sends us a wake-up call for doing good works.

#### A. God expects better things from Christians.

*But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love that you have shown toward His name, **in that you have ministered to the saints, and still are ministering.** And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end, so that you not be sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises (Hb 6:9-12).*

The Hebrew writer is talking about things that accompany salvation, things that involve ministry, ministry to the saints. Possibly some of those to whom he was writing had given up. They became sluggish. The exhortation to those who were sluggish was that they get back to work. Those who inherit the promises are those who by faith work and labor out of love. Their faith and labor of love is “*shown toward His name.*” **Their ministry to the saints was the visual identity of their faith and love.** Ministry was evidence of their discipleship. Therefore, if there is no ministry, there is no discipleship. In our work, therefore, we manifest that we are disciples of Jesus. **The one who is not minister-**

**ing on a continual basis has no claim to discipleship.** Ministry is our gift to others because of our own salvation.

## **B. God expects fervent love among disciples.**

Fervent love is the spirit (attitude) of the Christian that sets him or her apart from the world. Jesus said that His disciples would be known by their love of one another (Jn 13:34,35). In the epistles, the Holy Spirit threw in the word “fervent” in reference to our spirit in order that we get the point. Paul wrote, “... *not lagging behind in diligence, **fervent in spirit, serving the Lord***” (Rm 12:11). A few years later, Peter added, “*Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth in sincere love of the brethren, **love one another fervently with a pure heart***” (1 Pt 1:22). “*And above all things have **fervent love among yourselves, for love will cover a multitude of sins***” (1 Pt 4:8).

<p><b>Disciples Serve Because They Are Saved.</b></p>
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One of the assets of Apollos was his spirit. He was a man who was “*fervent in the spirit*” (At 18:25). Those who are disciples of Jesus are identified by their fervent spirit. If there is no fervent spirit, then there is a problem with the motivation. God wants His people to be fervent in their ministry to one another and others. They must “*abound in love for one another, and toward all ...*” (1 Th 3:12).

None of us should feel comfortable with the love we have for one another. We should continually seek to excel in expressing our love for one another. Though the Thessalonians knew their responsibility to love one another, Paul exhorted them to continue to grow in this area. “*But concerning brotherly love, you have no need that I write to you, **for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another***” (1 Th 4:9). The Thessalonians knew the commandment to love one another (See Jn 13:34,35). “*And indeed you practice it [love] toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia*” (1 Th 4:10). They were being a loving church to those throughout their area. However, there was a danger of losing their “first love.” Love grows cold if it is not nurtured, and it can

**Love Is Never Stagnant,  
But Continually Grows  
With Growing Relationships.**

be nurtured only by being put into practice. If it is not put into practice, it becomes lukewarm and indifferent. Any love that is not in action is no love at all.

Therefore, Paul exhorted the Thessalonian disciples, "*But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more ...*" (1 Th 4:10). If there is no "increasing more and more," then love grows cold. No matter how much we love, we must be increasing our love more and more.

Everyone has some level of love. This is not the point. The point is the task of increasing our love, which means increasing the manifestation of our love through works. Are we working on increasing love more and more? The only way to do this is to be increasing our good works toward others. **If our works are not increasing, then certainly our love is not increasing.** There is responsibility that comes with love. That responsibility is that true love must be expressed through service, and that service must increase as we grow in love. It is for this reason that love often grows cold. We cease having a desire to serve others, as Paul said, more and more. People who fall out of love with one another terminate their service for one another.

### **C. Created in Christ for prepared works.**

Before one is taken to the waters of baptism, he or she should be taught the principle of Ephesians 2:8-10.

*For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest anyone should boast. **For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before that we should walk in them.***

We should not be confused by this passage. Paul is discussing works of law and good works. I am not saved by my works of law. I am not saved by earning God's grace. We can understand this because we cannot keep law perfectly in order to save ourselves or do enough good

works to earn salvation or atone for our sins. However, all that God did through the grace that was revealed on the cross was to produce a disciple that would get to work for Him. In fact, just in case we rise up out of the waters of baptism without knowing what to do, “*God prepared before*” the works that we should do. We are not created in Christ **by** good works, but **for** good works. There is a significant difference between the two prepositions in reference to good works.

Paul said the same in Philippians 2:12,13. “*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling**, for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure.*” God has prepared work for us to do. It is not that we work **for** our salvation. We **work out** our salvation. We have salvation by the grace of God. Now that we have it, we work it out with the works He has prepared for us to do.

<p><b>We Are Created In Christ For Work, Not By Work.</b></p>
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*and trembling*, for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” God has prepared work for us to do. It is not that we work **for** our salvation. We **work**

**out** our salvation. We have salvation by the grace of God. Now that we have it, we work it out with the works He has prepared for us to do.

Did you notice how Paul used the word “obeyed” in Philippians 2:12? He did not use it in reference to obeying the law of God. The Philippians had already done that in their obedience to the gospel. He used it in reference to doing the work of God. When the Philippians went to work in service to others they were “obeying” God. The person who is doing no work, therefore, is not obeying God. He is disobedient. He is rebellious against what God would have him doing. In the parable of the unprofitable servant Jesus said that this was the wicked and lazy servant (Mt 25:26).

The greatness of the Philippian disciples is that they caught the fervent spirit by which disciples are to work. The apostle did not have to be a ruler in their presence in order that the works happen. On the contrary, in Paul’s absence, they fervently worked. They knew that they had been created in Christ by the grace of God, and thus they were motivated to get to work for Christ. Those who understand the grace of God, therefore, understand that they must get to work in thanksgiving of that grace. If we are to be God’s workmanship, then we must get to work.

Lazy Christians deny the workmanship of God. They manifest that they have no appreciation for their salvation by grace.

If God has prepared work for us to do, then the obvious question is, What are those works? Secondly, we must ask ourselves, Am I looking for those works to do? We know that we have been given at least one talent. We know that we must perform with what we have been given. At least the one-talent man recognized that he possessed his talent, his work. The problem was that he did not get to work with it. He dug-and-hid. Since he buried his talent, I am sure he was not looking for more.

<b>Thankful Christians Look For Work To Do.</b>
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I would suggest that our discipleship **depends on whether we are looking for prepared works that God is willing to give us to do.** If we are not, then we are no disciple of Jesus. True disciples assemble with other disciples in order to find works to do (Hb 10:24,25). If they are not looking for works to do, then they will forsake any such assembly that deals with stirring up good works. On the other hand, those who have a sincere desire to work for Jesus will seek meetings where they can find work to do. Since it is their nature to work, they go where the work is.

#### **D. Disciples are called to work.**

When we are discipled to Jesus, we are called into Christ to work. The church is the assembly of those on earth who are the workmanship of God, and thus, God's army of fervent workers for His cause. They are called to the work. If one seeks to be a disciple of Jesus, but does not understand this principle, then he cannot be a disciple (See Lk 14:25-35). How can one be a disciple if he or she is not willing to work as a disciple? **Discipleship is not in name only.**

The disciples in Antioch illustrate this point. When some of the leading disciples were in Antioch, they fasted and prayed. As a result of their fasting and prayer for work to do, the Spirit came and said, "*Separate*

for Me Barnabas and Saul **for the work to which I have called them**" (At 13:2).

**When We Pray For Work,  
God Will Give Us Work.**

They were fasting and praying **before** the Spirit gave the direction. They were thus seeking direction. They were seeking work to do. From the context of what happened in Antioch, it seems that the Spirit will not go to work for us unless we are seeking to go to work.

The particular work they were given to do was to go forth and preach. After they left Antioch of Syria, Paul defined the work to those of Antioch of Pisidia to whom he and Barnabas were sent. "**Men and brethren ... to you the word of this salvation has been sent**" (At 13:26). This was a noble evangelistic work to which they had been commissioned. When it came to retracing their steps on the second missionary journey, Paul did not want Mark to go with them again because on the first journey he did not continue "**with them to the work**" (At 15:38). I would suggest that many brethren are as Mark was on the first journey. I believe Mark gave up praying for a mission when the going got tough. It is not that everyone is an evangelist. But everyone must be evangelistic. If a disciple is not fasting and praying in order to be evangelistic, then how can he or she lay any claim to being a disciple of the One whose mission it is to "**seek and save the lost**" (Lk 19:10)?

Paul exhorted Timothy to do the "**work of an evangelist**" (2 Tm 4:5). And this Timothy did. "**Now if Timothy comes,**" Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "**see that he is with you without fear, for he does the work of the Lord as I also do**" (1 Co 16:10). Epaphroditus, who was sent out by the Philippian church, risked his own life "**for the work of Christ**" (Ph 2:30). I must ask myself if I am doing the work of Christ. "Am I evangelistically seeking and saving the lost?" This is what disciples do. They are fishers of men (Mt 4:19). **If I am not fishing, then certainly I am not a disciple.**

Every disciple must prepare himself or herself to do the work of Christ. "**Therefore, if a man cleanses himself from these, he will be a vessel to honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for**

**every good work**" (2 Tm 2:21). Preparing for the work of Christ means cleansing our attitudes and life-styles. We must prepare ourselves to do those good works God has prepared for us. God set apostles, prophets, evangelists and shepherd/teachers in the church "*for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry ...*" (Ep 4:11,12). Wondering how this is going to be done in your life? Listen to this. "*Now the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead ... equip you in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well-pleasing in His sight ...*" (Hb 13:20,21). Ephesians 4:11,12 teaches that

<p><b>We Must Be Confident That God Will Prepare Us For The Work He Has Prepared For Us.</b></p>
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we have a responsibility to equip one another unto every good work. However, Hebrew 13:20,21 teaches that it is God who is doing the equipping. **If we refuse to be equipped, we are refusing to allow God to work in our lives through other disciples in order that we be equipped.**

If people do not want to do good works, they will not submit to equipping. Sometimes, therefore, the lack of good works in our lives is evidence of our rebellion against God. We are wicked because we are lazy. If we do not want to work, then certainly we will resist every effort from others to stir up love and good works in our lives. "**Let us consider one another to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together ...**" (Hb 10:24,25). If our assemblies are designed after the purpose explained in Hebrews 10:24,25, then the lazy will not show up for the assembly. The one who forsakes the work-oriented assembly of stirring up love and good works is the one who does not want to work. If one does not want to work, then why would we expect him to attend an assembly that is designed for stirring up love and good works?

But look at the other type of assembly that is so prevalent today. This is the assembly that has lost its purpose. If one is in attendance at this assembly, but is rebellious to work, then the nature of the assembly has changed. There are no stirring lessons from the teacher. There is no encouragement to become involved in the lives of others. Because

the leaders do not want to run away any contributors, the sermons are as weak as water and the appeal of the assembly is to soothe ears that itch (See 2 Tm 4:3). Possibly, the assembly is of a nature that one can sneak in, sit on a distant bench, and then slip out after the “closing prayer.”

**Servants Look For  
Meetings For Service.**

Have we developed assemblies that will allow nonworking members to sit comfortably while there is work to be done? Has Christianity digressed into a churchianity wherein members assemble for their own pleasure without being stirred and equipped in the ministry of the saints? Is this the great apostasy of our century?

Consider Colossians 1:9,10. Paul prayed for the Colossians that they might be filled with the knowledge of God's *“will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, so that you might walk worthy of the Lord to fully please Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.”* This sounds like a work and study passage. In order to please the Lord – that is our reason for being disciples – we must work and study.

Many years ago there was an advertisement by a hamburger company that took pride in the amount of beef they had in a large sized hamburger. They used an elderly woman who was short in stature to get their point across. She would simply stand before the service counter of a competing hamburger shop. Once the competitor's hamburger was served to her, all she would say was, “Where's the beef?” Across America this short elderly woman was known for saying, “Where's the beef?”

When we stand before the counter of God in judgment, will God say, “Where's the fruit?” There will be no joy among fruitless Christians in the judgment. The Judge will say to every lukewarm Christian, “Where's the fruit?” If we are going to be well pleasing to God, then we must bring forth fruit in every good work. If our walk of discipleship is to be worthy and pleasing to Jesus, then we must personally be fruitful. Our connection with Jesus as a branch must be evidenced by the fruit that

**Disciples Are Known  
By Their Fruit.**

we produce in our lives to the glory of God.

### E. Christians must have a work ethic.

I was once working on our campus site by clearing trees, mowing grass, hauling rocks with a wheelbarrow, and an assortment of other things. My wife had employed a maid to clean the house in order that she be freed to work in the offices. One day after the maid had observed my behavior, she asked my wife, "Did he grow up on a farm?"

Farm boys develop what is called a work ethic. A good friend of mine once visited us at Africa International Missions for a period of one month. He worked twelve hours a day, every day. And you guessed it. He also was a farm boy. Where we both grew up on the farm in Kansas, we worked from six in the morning to nine in the evening, six days a week. We learned a work ethic, an ethic that every farmer understands, and every farm boy becomes. So it is with disciples of Jesus. **They must learn a work ethic for Jesus.**

The inspired writers laid an injunction on everyone who would be a disciple of Jesus. That injunction was work. We must be a **"doer of the work"** (Js 1:25). **"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves"** (Js 1:22). **"Remind them ... to be ready for every good work ..."** (Ti 3:1). **"Be careful to maintain good works"** (Ti 3:8). **"And let our brethren learn to maintain good works to meet urgent needs so that they will not be unfruitful"** (Ti 3:14). **"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord"** (1 Co 15:58). **"Teach that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute ..."** (1 Tim 6:18). God the Father and His Son will establish us **"in every good word and work"** (2 Th 2:17).

I think we need to go through this again. Christians are to be doers of the word and work. Not to do such would be self-deception. They are to be always ready for every good work, being careful to maintain

good works in their lives. If they do not have this work ethic when they become Christians, then they must learn. They must learn how to maintain good works. If they do not, then they will be unfruitful. They will not be pleasing to the Lord. Their life-style of work is not “as the need may arise.” It is a behavioral principle of life, for they must always abound in the work of the Lord. Disciples must be taught how to do good works in order that they be established in every good word and work.

**Disciples Are Known  
By Their Work Ethic.**

The question is, are you there? Have you learned how to maintain good works as a life-style? Are you fruitful? Do you ever think you will hear the question, “Where’s the fruit?” These are questions each one of us must ask ourselves. We must be honest with ourselves, since the Bible places good works as the evidence of our discipleship.

#### **F. Christians must be known for their good works.**

It is interesting to discover how God says one is known for being full of wisdom. “*Who is a wise and understanding man among you? Let him show by good behavior his works in meekness of wisdom*” (Js 3:13). The one who has a life-style of meekly working for the benefit of others is the one who is wise and has understanding. Without works, others cannot determine the character of the Christian, or even if one is a Christian, for many people say they are Christians. The problem is that there are too many who are Christians in name only, which thing does not exist. Whether individuals or churches, therefore, our good works must manifest that we belong to Jesus. Without the evidence of the works, we are not known in our communities for being disciples of Jesus. The fact is that we will not be claimed by Jesus to be His disciples if we are not known for our works.

**1. The good works of Dorcas:** Dorcas was certainly a wise person with great understanding. She was known throughout the commu-

**Wise Disciples Are  
Full Of Good Works.**

nity for what she did. “*Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, who by translation is called Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable works that she did*” (At 9:36). Everyone knew of Dorcas because of the works she did. When Peter came, “*all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the coats and garments that Dorcas made while she was with them*” (At 9:39). It seems that the entire city knew that she was a disciple because of her works. The evidence of her discipleship was in her works.

**2. The good works of widows:** Paul wrote to Timothy concerning the qualifications of those who are to be enrolled as widows in order to receive the care of the church. One of the qualifications was that each candidate be “*well reported of for good works ...*” (1 Tm 5:10). If a widow did not manifest good works in her life, she could not be enrolled as a widow to receive help from the church. Does this sound harsh? Or, is Paul simply stating that the only way we can determine if a widow is a disciple is by seeing her “coat and garment” work?

Since a widow could not be enrolled unless she was sixty years old (1 Tm 5:9), I suppose this teaches that one is never too old to be doing good works. I do not think there is any concept in the Scripture when one becomes too old to do good deeds for others. The point is that discipleship in good works is a lifetime behavior. The work ethic of discipleship only comes to a close when one is either incapacitated in life or dead.

**3. The good works of leaders:** If all disciples are to be full of good works, then certainly all who would be leaders of the disciples must manifest a life of good works. Paul wrote to Titus, “*In all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works ...*” (Ti 2:7). The word “pattern” refers to a life-style. Our leaders must have a work ethic. Leaders among disciples must be out front with good works. Jesus said, “*And whoever of you desires to be the first will be the bond-servant of all*” (Mk 10:44). There is no leadership by command among the

disciples of Jesus. There is no leadership by post or office in the church. Jesus said to the disciples, *"You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them. And their great ones exercise authority over them. **But it will not be so among you. But whoever desires to be great among you, will be your servant**"* (Mk 10:42,43).

**Good works are the manifestation of leadership among the disciples of Jesus.**

Leaders lead us by their example of good works. There should never be leaders among us who give commands and orders from authority that is characteristic of the leaders in the political and business world in which we live. Jesus frankly said, *"It will not be so among you."* Leaders are known among disciples through their good works, not their authority to command. Anyone in the church who would presume to be a leader, therefore, must first be known for his or her good works.

<p><b>Leaders Are Identified Among Christians By Their Good Works Among All Men.</b></p>
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This is the peril of boardroom leadership. I have found in business/industrial cultures that there is a great tendency to bring the style and behavior of leadership of the secular business environment into the ranks of the disciples. We assume that if one is successful in leading a business, then he would be a successful leader among the disciples. I would caution us on this point. If someone is successful in the business world, he is often such because of the great amount of time he puts into his business. He is skilled in managing people in a business context of orders and commands. But must I remind you of something here concerning zeal for good works? Leadership in the church is identified by **"a pattern of good works,"** not by implementing personnel work orders at the workplace. I may be able to successfully manage a business, **but if I do not have time in my life to show an example of good works, then I am not qualified to be a leader of God's people.** It may be that I am living in comfort in Jerusalem because I have been successful, but at the same time, allowing the city of God to remain in ruins. What

kind of leader is that? It is not the kind you need to lead God's people. Leadership in the church is not by handing out work mandates from behind closed doors. It is by leading out front through good works. If you do not have the time to do good works for others because of the demands of your job, then you cannot be a leader among God's people.

In our apostasy from the leadership that Jesus intended, we have now developed a leadership that is confined to boardroom decision making. Since all the disciples are also busy in their businesses, seeking only an "hour of worship" with God on Sunday morning, they have accepted the administrative skills of men who lead only by making decisions. Where are those working churches that demand working leaders? The apostate church is the one full of financially successful members who are lead by financially successful leaders, none of whom are personally involved in serving others through good works.

**4. *The good works of churches:*** The seven churches of Asia in the book of Revelation had their problems. Sin had plagued their behavior to the point that their influence as the church of God was about to be removed from cities. Nevertheless, throughout Jesus' judgment of the churches there is one thing for which they were known. To Ephesus He said, "***I know your works and your labor and your patience ...***" (Rv 2:2). To Smyrna He said, "***I know your works and tribulation and poverty ...***" (Rv 2:9). To Pergamos He said, "***I know your works and where you dwell ...***" (Rv 2:13). To Thyatira He said, "***I know your works and love and service and faith ...***" (Rv 2:19). To Sardis He said, "***I know your works ...***" (Rv 3:1), though He had not found their works completed (Rv 3:2). To Philadelphia He said, "***I know your works ...***" (Rv 3:8). And to Laodicea He said, "***I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot ...***" (Rv 3:15). Does it not sound interesting that though they were all caught up in some sin problems, their identification as churches of Christ was by their works? Even Laodicea was known as a church of Christ, though her works were lukewarm. The point is that for a church to be recognized by Jesus to be a church of people that belong to Him, they must be known for being a working

people. If you do not work as a church, you are no church of Christ. If one does not work as a disciple, he or she can make no claim of being a disciple of Jesus.

I think it is interesting that Jesus never said, “I know your correct doctrine ....” It was work that made them His church. Are we justified as His church by our works? Did the early church grow because of correct doctrine, or by being full of good works that expressed their love among themselves and others?

**The Church Of God  
Is Identified By  
The Fervent Work  
Of The Membership.**

In the context of stating the preceding, I suppose I must set you at ease. Yes, correct teaching is absolutely necessary. We cannot get to heaven on our own traditions and misguided teachings. But have we missed the point? I think the reverse is true also. We cannot get there by doctrine without works. Our obsession with correct teaching in the midst of a history of debate with man-made religions has warped our understanding of discipleship. We now believe in “doctrine only” salvation, that is, correct doctrine without works will result in eternal glory. That theology is just as dead as trying to get to heaven by works alone. I may teach the correct fundamentals, but if my teaching and life do not show “*a pattern of good works,*” then it is a futile effort in religiosity and self-deception.

## Chapter 7

# STIRRING UP GOOD WORKS

The Hebrew writer laid on every Christian the responsibility of stirring up love and good works in the life of his or her brother or sister in Christ (Hb 10:24,25). It is a mutual responsibility. How this is done would first start with an investigation into the Scriptures concerning correct motives for working for Jesus. Since our motives can sometimes be misguided, it would be good here to take another look at what God ex-

pects concerning correct motives for doing good works. But first, consider some motives that are wrong.

### A. Negative motives for good works:

In a book as this, and in an age as this wherein a misunderstanding of grace has seemingly overshadowed the necessity of good works, we must speak clearly concerning the grace by which we are saved. When one truly understands the awesome blessing of grace, **he or she cannot refrain from doing good as a response to grace.** However, a misunderstanding of grace seems to plague the lives of some disciples. They are plagued simply because they initiate no good works.

The Scriptures teach, “*For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest anyone should boast*” (Ep 2:9,10). This one statement should settle the issue concerning works-oriented salvation. We are not saved by

**Salvation Must Be  
By Grace Because  
All Men Sin.**

meritorious works of either law or deeds. However, in order to emphasize this point, we must understand the nature of grace and the place of works of law and good works in relation to grace.

I personally do not believe that anyone who fully understands grace the way God intended that we understand it, can ever be idle and void of work. How can anyone who sees the glories of eternal life that came as a gift from the cross ever consider not doing something in thanksgiving to God?

**1. Salvation is by grace because of our inadequacies.** Salvation must be by grace simply because of what Paul stated in Romans 3:9,10. “*For we have before proved that both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin, as it is written, ‘There is none righteous, no, not one.’*” No one is righteous before God because no one can keep law perfectly in order to legally save himself. If just one sin separates us from God (Is 59:1,2) – and it does – then all people are separated from God because

of sin. It is for this reason that “*by deeds of law no flesh will be justified in His sight*” (Rm 3:20; see Gl 2:16). Therefore, we cannot save ourselves solely on the condition of obedience to law. We sin. And because we are separated from God as a result of sin, atonement must be made for our sin. Unfortunately, most religious people believe that atonement can be made for sin by doing good works. But there are a few problems with this thinking.

**If salvation is by works, then we are assuming that works atone for sin.** But no amount of works will atone for sin. If good works could atone for sin, then we would put God in debt by our works. “*Now to him who works, the reward is not credited according to grace, but according to debt*” (Rm 4:4). Now can one put God in debt to reward him? If we think we can place God in debt by our works to reward us with heaven, then the following two problems would also develop:

**a. If salvation is by good works, then we would always be in doubt concerning our salvation.** The reason for this is obvious. We would never know if we have done enough good works in order to be saved. We would lay our heads down at night and pray, “If I have been found faithful ....” We can never be “found faithful” if justification is by perfect keeping of law or a supposed atonement by good works. The point is that if salvation is by the accumulation of supposedly atoning or meritorious good works, then we would always be in doubt concerning the atonement by the amount of works we have done. We would just never know if we have worked enough. The point is that our salvation is not expressed in the subjunctive of “if.” We can be confident of our salvation because of grace. Our confidence is not in ourselves. It is in the grace of God.

**b. If salvation is earned by works, then the opportunity for boasting against one another on account of our works would develop.** This is what Paul had in mind when he said, “*... not of works, lest anyone should boast*” (Ep 2:9). One cannot claim to be “more saved” than another because he or she has performed more works. Since

**Salvation Can Never Be Dependent On Our Performance Because We Always Perform Inadequately.**

salvation is dependent on the grace of God, then there is no room for boasting. There is no room for considering the one-talent disciple “less saved” than the ten-talent disciple. The point is that a ten-million talented disciple still must be saved by grace.

**2. *The relationship between work and grace.*** Most people fail to understand that there is a difference between **works of law** and **good works**. Works of law refer to obedience to the given law of God. Good works refer to actions we do in ministering to others. We cannot be saved by works of law simply because we cannot keep law perfectly in order to demand salvation from God. If in our sin we think we can legally atone for sin with good works, then we are arrogant, and still believe that we can demand salvation on the basis of our meritorious performance. It is for this reason that salvation must be by grace.

We are insufficient in works of law because we cannot keep law perfectly. We are insufficient in good works as atonement because we can never in a lifetime do enough good works to desire the reward of heaven. We must depend on the grace of God.

**Good Works Do Not Atone For Sin Against Law.**

If one is motivated to be saved on the basis of his performance of law, Paul says that the honest person will always be frustrated. If one is motivated to be saved on the basis of presenting to God good works for atonement, he too will be frustrated and disappointed. Such motives for obedience cannot be correct in reference to our work as disciples of Jesus. They are both scripturally and logically wrong.

On the other hand, understanding correct motives for obedience and good works brings peace of mind. If one can understand the correct motives by which the disciple of Jesus is stirred into action, his whole world view will change. I believe, however, that for some it is often difficult to understand biblically defined motives for obedience. They are difficult to discover because we live in a world that has created too

many works-oriented religions that are cultic in nature.

In rejecting the word of God as the source by which we define our behavior as Christians, men have manufactured all sorts of twisted schemes of salvation, all of which generally express the arrogance of man, and thus are humanistic in nature. Since we are often proud in seeking to manifest our religious performance, we insert this pride into

**We Can Never  
Place God In Debt  
With Our Works.**

our methods of salvation. We thus like to perform in competition with one another. We develop a competitive theology of works that exalts us above one another, which exaltation gives us a position in our man-made religious hierarchies. The best performers reach the highest positions in the power structures. But such performances are often generated by wrong motives in reference to the word and work of God. It is for this reason, therefore, that we must look closely in the Scriptures for the correct motives by which we are to be moved into action as the disciples of Jesus.

## **B. Positive motives for good works.**

When motivated by correct reasons, the Christian life becomes very dynamic. This is the exciting thing about being a Christian. When one's motives are right for Christian behavior, an abundant and dynamic life of discipleship comes alive. Once one understands what God has done and is doing among His people, a fervent spirit is generated within those who respond to God's word and work in this world.

The response of the Philippian disciples to that which they received from Paul illustrates the point. Paul first came to Philippi on his second missionary journey (At 16). Luke recorded that he stayed there only a few days (At 16:12). Lydia, the jailor, and their households were the first converts (At 16:14,15,33). Paul then departed for Thessalonica (At 17:1). A few years later, he wrote that Lydia and the jailor, immediately after their conversion, sent support to him while he was in Thessalonica (Ph 4:15,16). Add to this the fact that according to 2 Corinthians 8:1-3, the

Philippian disciples as a church contributed to the famine victims of Judea out of their deep poverty. Our question is, Why do disciples respond in this way? There must be something in the message of the gospel that will cause this type of response. It is for this reason that when we fully understand the message of God's grace, we cannot but respond as the Philippians. The following points are those central motives by which sincere disciples are stirred into action as the Philippians:

**1. Motivated by thanksgiving.** *“For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God”* (2 Co 4:15). This is really a great passage. In the midst of great evangelistic work in a first century world of pagan and legalistic religions, the grace of God was being preached to people in bondage. When those in bondage understood the grace of God, they were extremely thankful to God for the grace that was made known through the cross. *“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lust, we should live sensibly, righteously and godly in this present age”* (Ti 2:11). The greatest message that can be preached to the world is the grace of God. It causes obedience in the lives of the thankful. And in being thankful, glory is given to God.

Grace causes thanksgiving. Every time a disciple does a good work, he or she is saying, “Thank you, God. Thank you, Jesus.” When one fully understands the grace of God in his or her life, he or she will respond with works of thanksgiving. Those who are not working, therefore, are often not working because they do not understand the significance of the grace by which they are saved. But in truth, every true disciple who is thankful for his or her salvation, will be full of good works.

**Grace Through Jesus  
Is God's Message  
To The Lost World.**

I believe the life of Paul illustrates what grace can do in one's life. Before he submitted to Jesus, he was a very religious person. He was zealous in his former life to do what he thought was the will of God. However, he performed after the legal manner of Judaism. *“I was cir-*

**Good Works Tell God  
“Thank You” For His Grace.**

*cumcised the eighth day. I am of the nation of Israel, the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, and according to law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness that is in law, blameless” (Ph 3:5,6). One could not have been a better legalistic Jew. But after obeying the gospel, Paul wrote in reference to his former life,*

*But what things were gain to me, those things I have counted loss for Christ. Indeed more, I count all things lost for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things. I count them rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness that is from law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness that is from God by faith (Ph 3:8,9).*

Paul found grace in Christ. It is interesting that this very legalistic Jew was used by the Holy Spirit to write the two greatest books of the New Testament on grace, Romans and Galatians. I think the Spirit knew that one who had been the best in the bondage of legalism should be the one who would in his life and teaching be the best to explain the curse of legal religion and the blessing of freedom through grace. In 1 Corinthians 15:10 Paul stated what grace did to his life.

*But by the grace of God I am what I am. And His grace toward me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.*

What a powerful testimony! Legalism does produce works. However, the testimony of Paul’s life after he discovered grace, **is the fact that grace will produce more abundant works than legalistic religiosity. Grace is always a greater motivation than law.** Therefore, we preach grace, not to settle people comfortably into their pews, but to stimulate a positive response for good works. If a Christian is not working, **he or she does not understand the motivation of God’s grace.**

If a Christian is not working, God's grace was in vain in his life. One works because of the grace that was revealed on the cross in order not to make the sacrifice of Christ a wasted effort for his or her salvation. God's grace was certainly not in vain in the life of the apostle Paul.

**The Formerly Legalistic  
Paul Wrote The Two  
Greatest Books On Grace.**

**2. Motivated by faith:** James wrote, "*Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works*" (Js 2:18). Can true faith be known without works? Absolutely not! That is what

**Grace Motivates  
More Than Legalism.**

James said. This is what the Hebrew writer wanted to convey when he spoke of the disobedient Israelites who were not allowed to enter the rest of the promised land because of their lack of obedience.

The Hebrew writer introduced the subject by saying, "*Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering into His rest [of heaven], any of you may seem to come short of it*" (Hb 4:1). He goes on to say that the gospel was preached to us as good news of the promised land was preached to the Israelites (Hb 4:2). "*But the preached word did not profit them, because it was not united with faith in those who heard*" (Hb 4:2). Did they believe in God? Certainly! But did their faith move them to obey? Certainly not! Those Israelites who believed were allowed to enter because of their obedient response to the will of God (Hb 4:3,6). The Hebrew writer's conclusion is, "*Therefore, let us labor to enter into that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience*" (Hb 4:11). Our faith in the good news of the rest that is set before us should motivate us to get to work. If it does not, then we will fall short.

When the Bible speaks of faith, it is not speaking of faith only. James made this clear in James 2. The faith that is pleasing to God (Hb 11:6), is the faith that responds. It does not simply respond in obedience to the salvational directions of God to bring us into Christ. It moves us to respond with an obedient life of good works. This is what Paul had in mind in Romans 3:31. "*Do we then make void law through faith? Cer-*

tainly Not! On the contrary, **we establish law.**” The point is that faith moves one both to obey the law of God, as well as do good works throughout one’s life in appreciation to what God has done for us. In this way law is established in our lives.

**Faith In The Rest  
That Is Before Us  
Motivates Us To Work  
In Thanksgiving  
Before We Receive  
The Rest.**

**3. Motivated by fear:** Peter preached, **“But in every nation he who fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him”** (At 10:35). Fear of God produces works of righteousness. I know there is the trend to replace the word “fear” in our religious vocabulary with the word “reverence.” “Reverence” is a soft word. It leans toward “respect” and “worship.” It is a word with which I can be comfortable if I am doing nothing for Jesus. We certainly must have reverence for God. But there is more to the definition of fear than reverence. The word “fear” is still in the text of the Bible, and Christians must have a healthy fear of God. After all, it is God who will condemn us to destruction in a fiery hell if we are lazy in good works and disobedient in reference to His word (Mt 25:41).

**Fear Of God Must  
Move Us Into Action.**

We fear the awesomeness of God. At least Felix had enough sense to fear God and the judgment to come. When Paul *“reasoned about righteousness, self control and judgment to come, Felix became frightened ...”* (At 24:25). Unfortunately, his fear moved him to chase the preacher away. Nevertheless, he understood that there was a day of accountability coming in which we must give account of our deeds before the Lord. Demons tremble because they know the certainty of their judgment (Js 2:19). *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad”* (2 Co 5:10). This time of accountability should stir seriousness in our hearts concerning our responsibility to get to work for Jesus.

When we know that we will give account for our deeds, there should be a sense of fear in the hearts of those who are outside the grace of

God. Christians can have boldness in the day of judgment only because they have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ (1 Jn 2:1). However, those who are idle in their ways, and are void of good works, must understand that they will not be justified before God with a faith that is without works. If one's life is void of good works, it is a time to be afraid, very afraid.

**4. Motivated by love:** Love draws one to the needs of others. Love thus draws one to ministry. The reason good works are so necessary in our lives is that they manifest our love. The reason why good works are mentioned in the judgment scene of the Christian is because works reveal our hearts. And a heart that is not lovingly drawn to the needs of others is a heart that is unloving. It is a heart that is not prepared for eternal dwelling, and thus we conclude it is a heart that will not make it to eternal dwelling.

**a. Our love of God causes us to respond.** *“We love because He first loved us”* (1 Jn 4:19). This one brief statement should settle the matter concerning our response to the needs of others. If one does not respond in love to others because of the love that was extended toward him by God, **then certainly the love of God is not in his or her heart.** Since love cannot be manifested without good works, then the lack of works manifests an unloving heart. *“My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth”* (1 Jn 3:18). What I think John just said was that true love cannot be spoken with words. It must be manifested in “deed and truth.” If there are no deeds, there is no love. One cannot say, “I love you” if he or she is not willing to say, “I will labor for you.”

**b. Our love of our brother causes us to respond.** *“By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us”* (1 Jn 3:16). God's love for us generated action, the action of the cross (Jn 3:16). **By this action we know that God loves us.** God could have stayed in heaven and simply said, “You are all saved.” But the God of love had to act. And that action had to be manifested in a way that revealed the

loving nature of God. He expects no less from us.

Now apply this thought to our discipleship and our relationship with one another. In the same context, John exhorted, “*And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*” (1 Jn 3:16). John’s conclusion is that love must produce action. “*But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?*” (1 Jn 3:17).

**Good Works Manifest  
Our Love For Others.**

So we might think that John is a bit tough. But when I consider all that God had to go through in order to get me to where I am in Christ, I

**The Lack Of Good Works  
Manifests Our Lack Of Love.**

reconsider the fact that the totality of my life is a small price to pay in response to His love. Giving my life as a total commitment to God (Rm 12:1), means that I must live a life of good works for others. If this is not done, then I am dead while I live. “*He who does not love abides in death*” (1 Jn 3:14). Can that be more clear? It is for this reason that I am careful to maintain good works in my life (Ti 3:8). It is either good works or death. You make the choice for your own life.

*I cannot work my soul to save,  
For that my Lord has done;  
But I can work like any slave,  
For love of God’s dear Son.*

[unknown author]

**5. Motivated by a sense of responsibility:** I am saved, and thus I am responsible. Since Jesus found me, I am responsible for finding others. This is the logic behind statements of Scripture as Galatians 6:2. “*Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*” Paul added, “*Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially to those who are of the household of the faith*” (Gl 6:10).

**Workless Christians  
Are Dead While They Live.**

Now Galatians 6:10 is a very inter-

esting responsibility. I have heard people say, “As the need arises we are ready to do good works toward our brother.” Well, that is true. There are spontaneous needs that arise for which we do not plan. But there is often a hidden agenda of laziness in the lives of some disciples who hide behind the theology, “If a need arises.” “As the need arises” has moved some disciples into obscurity in their relationship with other disciples. They slip into large assemblies on Sunday morning. They immediately slip out after the “closing prayer.” By doing this, they remain obscure, hidden from needs that may arise in a close relationship with others.

The rich are famous for this slippery theology. Paul knew this, and thus gave some specific instructions to Timothy concerning their behavior. “*Charge those who are rich in this world that they not be highminded ...*” (1 Tm 6:17). The rich often distance themselves from others. They do so in order not to discover needs that may arise when they come close to others.

The problem with riches is that we think others are always trying to get our riches. We thus develop an isolated behavior in our relationship with others. We become distant. In this distant relationship, no “needs arise” for which we can be responsible. But Paul exhorted Timothy to teach the rich “*that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life*” (1 Tm 6:18,19).

<p><b>Disciples Cannot Live In Obscurity From The Needs Of Others.</b></p>
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I have discovered that as people economically excel in a society, they become more distant from one another in their relationships with others. On the other hand, those who are of poorer cultures tend to have a greater relationship with one another, both in society and in their behavior as Christians. Why is this? You know the answer.

As disciples of Jesus, we are responsible for one another. Because God created us, He took responsibility for our salvation. He could have

been as the deist would have us believe. He could have created us, and then run off to some distant place in the universe, detached from our needs. But He stayed close. He cared and loved and sent His Son. When we are “godly” we will also stay close and care and send ourselves to others. That is what it means to be Godlike. Therefore, disciples will seek to be as close and acknowledgeable as possible to one another’s needs. They will meet together in a way that needs can be identified and people can be known. They will be willing to be stirred to love and good works (Hb 10:24,25). Those who do not like this type of close relationship, will stay away. I have discovered that many disciples do not like to meet in small groups of disciples simply because they might discover a need for which they would be responsible. For this reason they want to hide in a large group, detached from any needs that they might discover.

#### 6. *Motivated to give glory to God.*

Doing good works is not about us. It is about God and His glory. It is about witnessing to the world that we belong to the Creator of all things. As Paul said, “... *it is God who works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure*” (Ph 2:13). Good works are not about bringing glory to ourselves. In fact, if that is our motive, then we disqualify ourselves from being candidates for heaven. Proud people go nowhere with God.

<p><b>Godliness Demands That We Go To Others As God Came To Us.</b></p>
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If we know that good works are about God working in us for His glory, then the reason for our works takes on a nature that is different from the nature of the good works that are accomplished by those who are not Christians. Muslims do good works. However, their good works are self-oriented. The Muslim has a meritorious system of works whereby one is seeking to be awarded with an afterlife that appeals to the flesh. The Christian, on the other hand, is seeking to give glory to God. It is God who is working in us to bring glory to Himself. “*For this purpose I also labor, striving according to His working that powerfully works in me*” (Cl 1:29). Paul worked, but his work was not self-oriented. It

was God working in him in order that glory be focused on God, not himself. He wanted us to know that the works that he was doing was actually **God working in him**.

God is “*working in you what is well-pleasing in His sight ...*” (Hb 13:21). God “*effectively worked in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcision*” (Gl 2:8). He also effectively worked in Paul toward the Gentiles. And it is God’s word “*that also effectively works in you who believe*” (1 Th 2:13). It is all God’s work. It is thus God who gets the glory. If it is God doing the work, then the glory goes to Him.

**Christians Work For The  
Glorious Of God, Not For The  
Glorious Of The Church.**

As sojourners in a world that often mistreats the disciples of Jesus, good works will accomplish the purpose of bringing glory to God. Peter encouraged, “*Keep your behavior honest among the Gentiles, so that when they slander you as evildoers, they may, because of your good works that they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation*” (1 Pt 2:12). If there were no other reason to do good works than to give glory to God, then that motivation would be sufficient. We must always keep in mind that if we do no good works, we are bringing no glory to God. We must, therefore, bring glory to God with us to the final judgment through our good works that give glory on earth.

## Chapter 8

# THE FINALITY OF WORKS

Good works not only have their reward in life, but they are also carried with us when we leave this world on our way to eternal dwelling in the presence of God. Please keep in mind that God will not be checking off meritorious good works. Since good works do not atone for our sins, as discussed in the previous chapter, the number of good works that we do will not be the foundation upon which we are judged. However, they

are necessary in order to manifest a sincerely motivated heart.

A sincere heart motivates good works. Therefore, the reward of heaven is the serendipity of good works because they have originated from a heart of love and thanksgiving. Though good works will result in a final “reward,” they also have a reward in this life. The busy Christian life is rewarded with joy, peace and honor. Because of the earthly and heavenly result of good works, it is easy to understand that they are an essential part of the Christian life. Through them characters are molded for eternal dwelling. We could conclude that because we have the choice in preparing our characters for eternal dwelling through the works we do, we will be judged because of our works, or lack of works.

### A. Good works bring honor in life.

In the midst of a New Testament letter that is dedicated almost exclusively to explaining the teaching of grace, we would think that there would be no mention of good works. But such is not the case in the book of Romans. In fact, Paul began the letter with the statement, “... *but glory and honor and peace to everyone who is working good* ...” (Rm 2:10). At the end of Roman dissertation he also wrote, “... *not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord* ...” (Rm 12:11). The point of Romans is that one has not experienced the grace of God in his life until that grace is manifested through good works.

**Good Works Manifest  
Our Understanding Of Grace.**

In Romans, Paul also wrote, “*Render ... honor to whom honor*” is due (Rm 13:7). The sacrificial laborer is not without honor. But if there is no labor, there is no honor.

“*And we urge you, brethren, to know those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake*” (1 Th 5:12,13). Those who labor among the disciples must be highly esteemed for their work’s sake. We naturally give praise to the one who has done well.

Paul exhorted women not to focus on the outward appearance (1 Tm 2:9). He rather encouraged them to focus on that ***“which manifests women professing godliness through good works”*** (1 Tm 2:10). Through good works, therefore, women profess godliness. To such women great honor must be given for the godliness of their behavior.

One does not work for the purpose of receiving recognition. To do so would negate the character building that comes from working. The

**Trumpet Blowers  
Have Received  
Their Reward.**

Pharisees blew a trumpet when they made a contribution to the poor in the synagogues and the streets of Jerusalem (Mt 6:2). If the Christian worker blows his trumpet, he has received his reward (Mt 6:1). Trumpet blowers, therefore, are working for the wrong reasons, and thus defeat the very purpose for the works that have been created in Christ for us to do.

Unfortunately, many people live in “trumpet blowing” religious cultures. As a result, we often seek to be Hollywood stars among our brethren by having our name marked before the multitudes in order to sell this or that book. If we carry out our good works with a motive to receive recognition, then we have defeated the character building effect of the works. If one has such a tendency, then it is time not to let the left hand know what the right hand is doing

**The More Our Light Shines,  
The More Glory God Gets.**

(Mt 6:3). However, if one’s motives are truly noble, then the Christian must let his or her light shine before men in order that God be glorified (Mt 5:16).

## **B. Good works will go with us to the judgment.**

One of the key teachings of the New Testament is the concept that good works play a significant part in the final judgment. Jesus said, ***“For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward every man according to his works”*** (Mt 16:27). Paul added that God ***“will render to everyone according to his deeds”*** (Rm 2:6). Then Peter added, ***“And if you call on the Father,***

*who without respect of persons judges according to each one's work, pass the time of your journey on earth in fear"* (1 Pt 1:17).

The judgments of the book of Revelation are permeated with the concept of judgment in the context of our works. To the church of Thyatira Jesus said, "*And all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works*" (Rv 2:23). A final picture of the judgment is given in Revelation 20:12,13.

**Judgment  
Is According To  
Good Works  
Because We Work  
According To  
God's Grace.**

*Then I saw the dead, small and great, stand before the throne. And the books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged from the things that were written in the books, **according to their works**. Then the sea gave up the dead who were in it. And Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged everyone **according to their works**.*

Jesus is coming again. He is coming for judgment. When John concluded the book of Revelation, he concluded with the words of Jesus who made a final proclamation concerning judgment. In this final exhortation of Jesus, our work as disciples is mentioned to be a significant part of our judgment. "*And behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every-one according to his work*" (Rv 22:12). If one has no work for which to give account, then he or she has a serious problem. It is not that our salvation depends on an account of works, but we must give account for the evil we worked in this life. If there are no good works which identify our godly behavior, **then there is no evidence for our faith, love and thanksgiving.**

**We Must Give  
Account Because  
God Has Given  
Us An Account  
For Which  
To Be Responsible.**

It is true that in the context of many judgment passages in the New Testament that judgment scenes are pictures of the judgment of the wicked. Because of their evil works, they are manifested to be evil, and

thus, worthy of condemnation. However, because the Scriptures speak of their just judgment to condemnation as a result of their evil works, the same holds true of the righteous. They will be justly rewarded because of their good works.

**As An Evil Heart  
Is Known By  
Evil Works, A Good  
Heart Is Known  
By Good Works.**

For this reason, the Holy Spirit uses works as a judgment standard in the pictures of judgment for our benefit. We know the unrighteous by their works. We know the righteous by their works.

God does not need to take an account of our works in order to determine our eternal destiny. He does not because He judges on the basis of our hearts. But we cannot know the true heart of any person. We can only be fruit inspectors, for by their fruits we know them. For this reason, therefore, the judgment scenes in the New Testament are written in a way that we can understand why one would be condemned or saved in judgment. The unrighteous will be condemned because there were no good works to manifest a righteous heart. The righteous will be saved because everyone, even the wicked, will have witnessed the righteousness of their hearts through their good works.

According to 2 Corinthians 5:10, we must all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ. It will be there that our works will manifest who we are. In comparing 2 Corinthians 5:10 with 1 Timothy 5:25, an interesting thought arises. The Corinthian passage teaches that we will give account for our good works. To Timothy, Paul wrote, "*Like-wise also, the good works of some are manifest beforehand, and those that are otherwise cannot be hid.*" Some good works are recognized in this life. For many of these we are given honor. However, there are many good works done by disciples that are not known by others. These works will be manifested in the end when nothing will be hidden. Therefore, if you do not receive recognition for the work you do now, be patient. Jesus will bring to light your good works in the end.

Regardless of recognition, in this life we must be persistent in doing good. This is the foundation upon which our character as Christians is built. It is the foundation of peace and happiness that comes as a result

of doing good to others. After washing the feet of the disciples, Jesus stated a very significant psychology in John 13:17. *“If you know these things, **happy are you if you do them.**”* Happiness comes from washing the feet of others. We can always know the happiest person. He or she is the one with the dirtiest towel. The serendipity for good works in life is a happy life. The final result of good works is joy in heaven.

### C. The Lord will reward us for good works.

I believe the theme verse of Revelation is 14:13.

*Then I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write, ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “so that they may rest from their labors, **for their works follow them.**”*

This is a beautiful thought for those who have given a lifetime for good works. The passage gives us confidence that our efforts are not wasted. God will recognize what we have done in this life, regardless of the injustices we may receive from life.

At the conclusion of the Holy Spirit’s revelation concerning the final resurrection, we are not surprised to discover that He focuses our minds on the labors we have done in service to the Lord.

*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that **your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*** (1 Co 15:58).

The Christian’s labor is not a useless effort in meritorious obedience. Our works will follow with us right into heaven. For those who do good works outside Christ, however, **their works are vain in reference to eternal glory.** As Christians, we appreciate the good works of those who are not Christians. However, the works of the one who is not a Christian are all in vain in

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The Christian’s Good Works Are Not Wasted Efforts Because They Are In The Lord.</b></p>
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reference to eternal judgment. Only those who are “in the Lord” will enjoy the eternal glory that comes with a good and faithful servant who has worked well in this life.

Christians must be confident, therefore, that God will not forget their good works. “*For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love that you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and still are ministering*” (Hb 6:10). He will remember every work. He will reward with heaven every good work of the Christian, though He will reward with eternal condemnation those who work evil (2 Tm 4:14). Because we will be rewarded, therefore, we look forward to the final coming of Jesus. Because we trust in the grace of God, we can with boldness say as John, “*Even so, come, Lord Jesus*” (Rv 22:20). Those who are faithfully working in kingdom business are looking forward to the coming of Jesus in order that they receive their rest in Him.

*He wasn't much for stirrin' out,  
It wasn't his desire.  
No matter what the others did,  
He was sittin' by the fire.*

*Same ole habit day by day,  
He never seemed to tire,  
While others helped to build the church,  
He was sittin' by the fire.*

*And when he died, as all must do,  
They said he went up higher.  
But if he's still doin' what he always did,  
He's still sittin' by the fire.*

(By an unknown possibly frustrated church leader.)

## Epilogue

If you have made it to this conclusion, then you have struggled with me through a long self-examination, and often repentance by understanding what God expects of His children. This has not been an easy journey because it has forced me into evaluating my life, as well as coming to the conclusion that many people whom I have considered “faithful” Christians and I dearly love, are in danger of being spewed out by our Lord in the final accounting of good works.

I suppose many have already come to this conclusion, since teachers have for years tried to alert the lazy of the peril they will eventually face because of a lack of good works in their lives. Sermon illustration books are full of stories, poems, jokes and illustrations about lazy church members. Church leaders for years have tried to motivate those who “dig and hide” their talents.

Many of us have experienced firsthand the result of inactivity and laziness in our own lives and in the lives of those who claim to be disciples but are doing nothing. We have wondered why some churches cease to grow. We have shuffled through preacher after preacher in order to find the right one who would get us growing again. But no Nehemiahs have arrived from Babylon. We have gone through a catalog of programs and committees. But no one has handed us a sword and a shovel and said “Watch and work!” Regardless of all our efforts, many churches have in many places come to zero growth, and many are declining. The city of God still remains in ruins.

We are worried about the problem of non-growth, but there seems to be no head-on confrontation with the reasons why we have ceased to grow, or what it takes to get growing. When nothing is happening in a particular church, we endlessly keep trying a series of solutions to generate activity and growth. But nothing seems to bring about the desired end that we start growing again. So what is the problem? I personally do not think it is any specific problem. It is an assortment of problems

that have set in and redefined the “Christianity” we believe. We have created a religion after our own desires, and now we are simply reaping the result of our creation.

This final inscription is only a survey of what I believe are some erroneous behavioral practices and beliefs that we must seriously confront in order to bring about repentance and growth. I offer my suggestions on what a church should do in order to repent. Bear with me as I take you through these points. If we can correct these matters, I believe God will bless us with growth. He wants growth, because growth means that heaven is being populated. So here are some things every disciple must do in order to be fruitful.

### **A. Let’s get to work!**

You know the events of Acts 6:1-7. A problem developed among the disciples. Widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food (At 6:1). As a result, a program was developed. A committee was formed. Seven men were chosen, and the program went to work to solve the problem. However, after the problem was solved, one man on the program committee was stoned by unbelievers, and another headed out doing evangelistic work (At 8). I assume the committee was dissolved since the problem was solved.

Now what’s the point? The point is that the church was in existence in Jerusalem for at least five years by the time this event took place. Does that turn on any lights? If it does, then you have started to think about the concept of programs and committees. **There was no “Distribution Committee” in the early church until a problem arose, when disciples stopped doing what disciples are supposed to be doing.** When the problem was solved, the committee was disbanded. Disciples went on with their normal work of doing good works – feeding all the widows – and evangelism.

When I read the account, therefore, **I discover that there was a problem because a program was formed in order to take care of**

**the problem.** Programs indicate that there are serious problems. In the Acts 6 case, widows – can you believe this – were being denied food. Were these disciples practicing “pure religion” (Jn 1:27)? Certainly not! And since they were sinning, a program had to be formed in order to take care of the problem.

Not only did the program result from sin in the camp, it was dissolved when the sin was solved. **A church without programs is a healthy church if Christians are doing what they are supposed to be doing.** Healthy churches need no committees of men to get disciples to do what they are supposed to be doing naturally every day of their lives.

But we are obsessed with programs. Youth programs. Senior programs. Mission programs. You know the “program.” Here is what I see in the church that is nigh unto death. It is a church laden with programs because disciples have to be “programmed” out of their pews in order to do what they are supposed to be doing naturally as disciples. The unfortunate program directors are laden with the responsibility of being recruiters and program directors. Now where in the New Testament do we find any of this? If I have to be recruited first to get to work, and then directed to stay at work, **something is seriously**

**Faithful Workers Are  
Focused On The  
Work  
Of God Because God  
Focused On Them  
Through Jesus.**

**wrong with me.** How many program directors have been burdened into discouragement because they could never get anyone to volunteer to work their program? If you have to be recruited into joining a program in order to work, then evidently you are doing no work at all as a disciple. Are you really a disciple if you are not doing the work of a disciple?

Now for a reality check. **Programs are not meant to get people to work, but to get working people more efficient and directed in what they work.** Get the point? When Christians who have a mind to work are going about doing their work, then things are happening. The program is only for the purpose of focusing workers into specific areas of need. But once they are focused, then what? Do we still need the program?

**We must never forget that the church is the program!** But when something goes wrong, when widows are neglected, then a temporary patch (a program) is necessary in order to correct the sin. In the case of Acts 6, **the lack of focus on the Grecian widows was the sin.** There was no benevolent work directed toward the Grecian Jewish widows. There was no “pure religion” in the hearts of some disciples who were normally making distribution to the widows, for they were intentionally neglecting some widows. This sin needed a committee of godly men to set things right.

I suppose, however, that business/industrial cultured churches cannot help themselves. Or can they? Is the highly organized and programmed church of urban business/industrial centers manifesting her sickness? I am old enough to remember that the rural church in the 50s in America had no programs. People were farmer work-oriented members. They were of a work-ethic culture that simply did the work. When something needed to be done, it just got done. No program. No committee. Everything just happened because everybody showed up. But when the church migrated to the cities and became elephant churches with members hiding on the back pews, things changed. Eventually, there were not enough back pews, and thus the infection of inactivity started to migrate toward the front of the auditorium. As time passed, rows of pews were taken over by the inactive. Once the inactive reached almost to the front of the auditorium, and the activity-oriented members could be counted on the first few rows of pews, the leaders became concerned. They realized that stagnation had set in and people needed to be recruited and organized to get them to work. But it did not work. The lack of growth continued. And now it has spread to a brotherhood of big city churches, and growth across a whole spectrum of churches is zero. Hello, Ephesus and Laodicea.

So what's the answer. You have just read the book. Get to work! There is no quick solution for growth other than going to work for Jesus. There is no fruit unless there is planting, watering and harvesting.

## B. Let's get out of the church house!

But now we have an inactive membership that is boxed in between an “opening” and “closing” prayer. After the closing prayer, a mental switch flicks, and members are on their way to do their own thing. “See you next Sunday, God.”

For many years I have preached across Africa, Latin America and the West Indies. I have conducted various seminars on numerous subjects. In these seminars, I often touch on the point of assembly-oriented religion. In dealing with this subject, I give my thoughts concerning the religion we have created after our own desires, which religion has conveniently adopted the “opening/closing prayer” behavior in reference to assemblies and our Christianity. What is interesting is that **everyone** knows the problem. No one disagrees. We laugh at ourselves, knowing that we have mentally created this “hour of worship” that confines God to a “place” and our “Christianity” to special performances (acts). We know it is wrong. We know that it is nowhere in the Bible. But we are this way and it is hard to repent. It is just convenient to turn God on and off with an opening and closing prayer.

**God Is Not Served  
In A Box.**

What has happened is that our “Christianity” has been compressed into the “hour of worship.” We thus often behave as the devil outside that hour, and sing like a saint during the time between the opening and closing prayers. And now we wonder why there is no one doing anything for Jesus outside the “hour of worship.” We wonder why some churches are dead, looking for a grave in which to be buried. If you are still reading, you probably agree. Don't you?

So you know the problem. We have made Christianity a church house oriented behavior that takes place on Sunday morning in some place. All our duties to be “Christian” are confined in the church house box, God is signed off after our worship performances, and we leave to do our “secular” work on our time. Jesus knew we would do this when He said that neither in the place of Jerusalem, nor a place on some

mountain, the true worshipers of God would worship in spirit and truth (Jn 4:21-24). There is a totality about life sacrifice that should be typical of discipleship behavior (See Rm 12:1). But we have moved from that behavior, leaving Jesus on a pew while we go on our way.

If I believe that my “Christianity” takes place in some place, then what do you think I will behave like outside that place? **Churches do not grow because the members have confined their “Christianity” to some place of worship.** We are good people who do no good outside the “hour of worship.” Outside the place where our Christianity takes place, we are not bad people. We are respectable people in the community. However, we are not initiating any good works. Herein is the problem. We have convinced ourselves that we do our good by attending an assembly, and this attendance relieves us of having to take an initiative to do good works outside the place and hour of worship.

I have heard and read some great lessons that are seeking to confront this problem. However, though the lessons are great, the teacher must understand that the vast majority of Christians are practicing “assembly-oriented” churchianity. The tendency of urban churches to so behave is strong. It is strong because of the demands of our secular jobs. It will take more than sermons on “our life is a worship to God”

**Tender Hands  
Desire No Callouses.**

to correct the matter. It will take strong leadership that is able to stir up in the people a mind to work in order to correct the sickness of indifferent religiosity. When a church has a high-budget “program,” I can almost guarantee that they will tell the preacher to calm it down lest contributors are run away. A church that is laden with a professional staff does not seek any Nehemiahs who will hand them a sword and a shovel.

### **C. Let’s restore individual priesthood!**

Someone once said that the rural follows the urban when it comes to cultural practices. And I suppose they are right. When discussing the behavior of the church, I know that such is the case. The point is that if

we form a concept of “church behavior” in the urban church, the concept will eventually filter down to the rural church. Rural folks want to behave like city folks. In a negative way, this has happened in the area of professional religious workers. We now maintain the concept that the church will not grow as it should unless we have full-time preachers.

In the urban church members are struggling to survive with jobs and traffic jams. Because of their tight schedules and the amount of time they have to put into their jobs in order to survive in urban centers, it is easy to departmentalize Christianity. Fellowship with other disciples simply becomes another appointment on the calendar. And what do we do with the “church business”? You guessed it. We do what we do in the professional world in which we are capitalistic creatures of cash. **We hire it done.** This business/industrial culture has subsequently influenced the thinking of the church. If something is to get done, we hire it done.

So now we have become the church that is often laden with a “staff” that includes everything from the janitor to the “pulpit preacher.” These are professionals we have hired to get the job done, which job is usually the job of every disciple. Since we have become economically strong, we can hire someone to do our work. This is a very convenient system when many of the members are struggling six days a week in an urban center just to survive. Or maybe it is not survive, but just to possess more and gain the money to do more things.

What happens in the above scenario is that **money becomes my work for Jesus.** Let’s see if this is not true.

**1. Professionalism produces clergy-oriented churches.** Now suppose you are a busy man, busy in making money in the world. You have little time for personal involvement in the lives of others, even in the lives of your brothers and sisters in Christ. In order to soothe your conscience, you throw money at what bothers you, just as you do in your business. If a problem develops, throw the money and the problem will go away. As in business, the money goes to professionals we hire to do the job.

So when we cannot get personally involved ourselves with our “religious work,” we do the same. We throw money at it by hiring someone to do the job for us. Our money, therefore, becomes our proxy good work. We can enjoy our work as a businessman, or car salesperson, or farmer, and at the same time feel good about someone else (our religious professionals) getting their hands dirty in the lives of the poor and unsaved. We evangelize through proxy. We are benevolent through proxy. Sounds convenient, and very Western church.

**The More We Hire It Done,  
The Less We Want To Do  
It Ourselves.**

Now you know why we have a clergy. The preacher – just say it, the clergyman – does our “church work” for us because we pay him to do it. If he does not get the job done, we get another one to help. If the burden for the two is too great, we hire another, and another. We now are proud of our staff, but unfortunately, we are now infected with “staffitis” and have a sick church on our hands.

But we are comfortable with this because we are giving our contribution. We watch our professionals perform while we maintain our “faithfulness” with attendance and a handsome check deposited in the collection tray as it passes by. It is a convenient religion. We are happy because we can do what we want to do in being successful business people in the world. The religious professionals are happy because they get to work full-time for the church. So you ask, What is wrong with this picture? I think you know the answer. The church ceased to grow several years ago and has not grown though we have added a number of staff workers. We are a “dead church walking.” But we have proved one point. Hiring a great number of staff does not make a church grow. The following point explains why.

**2. Professionalism produces one-man bands.** Now that the church is infected with “staffitis,” we go searching for the best “performing” preacher who will keep the contributors entertained with prolific speeches. Others seek to develop exciting and colorful assemblies that will captivate and encourage those who come to get something, but are unwilling

to give. In order to do this, we must first sell a key personality, both to ourselves, and the community in which we live. We brandish our iconic personality before ourselves and the community in order to draw people to Jesus through our icon. This fits well with Western business marketing and business structures.

As one journeys up the organizational structure of the staff, control becomes more dominant and centralized at the top. When we reach the top, everything is centered around the boss. We do not like the term “boss” in the church, so we call him “The Preacher,” or as some, “The pastor.” In Africa, this system fits well because the one on the top is the chief, and thus, we have tribal churches with little chiefs. They are churches that were built by the “chief,” and subsequently the franchised church exists as long as the chief lives. We thus have “one-man-band” churches in which members become spectators. And then we wonder why every member is not working hard for Jesus. And then, the following scenario develops:

**The Preacher Becomes  
A Clergyman When The  
Church Plays To His Tune.**

**3. Professionalism produces taker churches.** We need to take the point of professionalism to mission areas throughout the world. As professionalism has been developed in the culture of the sending churches, the sending churches seek also to develop the same in the mission points to which they send their evangelists. I cannot tell you how many times I have been asked, “For what church do you preach?” Does this betray the professional clergyism that is so prevalent in Western thinking? Certainly! Now translate this thinking into many local scenes of supported mission efforts throughout the world.

Since the Western thinking links growth with money, Western churches start throwing money directly into the local scene of a mission point in order to cause growth. Church buildings are built for the local folks. A local preacher is supported to work with one specific group of Christians. The damage that develops is that the local Christians now look at the foreign supported evangelist as the professional. He is the clergyman and all the work must focus around him. Since they now

believe that they are a mission point, not a mission church, their dependence on the foreign contributions leads them into “spiritual” ineptitude. They become a taker church, **freely receiving but giving nothing**. They do not develop their self-reliance and spiritual independence. As they develop the thinking, “take care of us,” they sink into a non-evangelistic syndrome of inactivity. Their hand is held out, not to give, but to take. Taker churches die a slow death. And the problem is that in the process of dying, they never figure out the problem for their death.

Those of you who are reading this type of book know of numerous illustrations of taker churches. These churches were initially planted by the zeal of a faithful evangelist who was sent out by a mission-minded church somewhere across the sea. A local church was established and a full-time preacher was supported to continue the nurturing of the church after the missionary left. After thirty years, the local preacher is an old man. The established church is also old, having never started another church in its entire existence or reached out in missions to go into all the world. The reason why it has no concern about missions is that it was trained to be a taker church. Taker churches are always on death row, waiting for the day of execution.

Now be honest. Do you think members would be encouraged to individually go to work when they feel that the work is the responsibility of the professionals among us? When we pay a professional to do the work, do you think we are individually motivated to get involved? This feeling is magnified when the support of the professional comes from some source

**The More Centralized  
The Leadership,  
The Less The Church Works.**

outside the local church group. You may argue with me on this point. But you know what I mean and what is a simple truth of human nature. **As long as there is a full-time professional in our presence, we will sit back on a bench or pew and let him do the work.** Right? You cannot argue with human nature.

There were full-time preachers in the New Testament. However, there seems to be a vast difference between what we read in the New

Testament in reference to full-time preachers and what we see practiced today. In the first century, **the preachers were moving about preaching to the lost**. They were not held up for one group of disciples. Today, on the other hand, preachers are moving in and preaching to the saved. We even take pride in the fact that we as preachers have stayed in one location for a great period of time. We rationalize that the community can get to know the icon and be drawn to where the icon preaches. Now that we rely on the icon to grow this church, what is there for individual members to do? Oh, yes, drop the pay check in the collection plate.

In 1972 Harding University took a survey of preachers of churches throughout America. Several things were revealed in that survey. But one interesting fact was that **the average stay of a preacher at a local church was two years and under**. At the same time, the church was the fastest growing religious group in America. Do I have to go into detail here for us to get the point? The point is that the preachers never stayed around long enough for the church to become dependent on them. The primary work of the preacher, who was really our hired teacher, was to teach. The rest of the members had to get out and do the work.

Just keep in mind one fact. We have only one icon as Christians. His name is JESUS. And when Jesus is our pride, we will establish again the individual priesthood of the believer and go to work for Him to the glory of our Father.

#### **D. Let's get our hands dirty!**

You know how this works. I just explained a part of the problem. When we have enough money, we can hire it done. There is no need for personal involvement, no hands-on work. Whenever there are sufficient funds available, it seems that personal involvement in the work declines. Is this an axiomatic truth? Possibly. At least large Western urban churches that have a lot of funds available often struggle locally to grow. They may have great mission outreaches, but personal involvement by the

local disciples often lacks. We thus take pride in our long-distance involvement in some foreign land, but at home we simply write off our personal involvement by a hefty check in the contribution plate.

Is the preceding what Paul had in mind when he charged Timothy to charge the rich that they “*be rich in good works*” (1 Tm 6:17,18)? There must be something about being rich that moves one away from personal involvement in doing good for others. Again, I do not think that Paul meant that the rich can solve the problem simply by throwing money at it. They should be ready to give (1 Tm 6:18). **But they must also be rich in good works.** That’s personal involvement! One can give to good works, but that is different from personal involvement in the work itself. The rich cannot distance themselves from that to which they give.

**We Cannot Buy Our Way  
Out Of Personal Involvement.**

Wealthy churches that are dying, therefore, should take a serious look at themselves. Personal involvement in doing good to others builds spiritual characters. And that is what God wants for eternal dwelling.

I believe this is what Jesus had in mind when He called on the rich young ruler to leave everything and follow Him. (See Mk 10:17-31). Jesus called for personal involvement and personal sacrifice as a disciple. Unfortunately, this was a paradigm shift the rich young ruler could not make. He could give the money, but he could not give himself. He could not lead by a “pattern of good works.”

Notice how Jesus concluded His teaching that was stimulated by the occasion of the rich young ruler. “*But many who are first will be last, and the last first*” (Mk 10:31). One may be first in the business world, but last when it comes to the life of being a working disciple of Jesus. And those servants of the world who are considered last by the world, will be first. They will be first because they have nothing to offer Jesus but the sacrifice of their entire lives in doing that which is good. Now that is something to think about.

Think of it this way. When we have all passed through the Pearly Gates, money will have no bearing on our relationships with one another.

Gold is so useless in heaven that streets are paved with it. Therefore, if the rich have had no practical training in how to relate with people on earth, how will they be prepared for eternal dwelling with people in heaven? I am sure the mansions of heaven will not have high walls built around them. If the rich cannot get out from behind their high walls on earth and into the lives of others, then certainly they are not candidates for heaven. It is for this reason that money should never become an obstacle in building our relationships with others.

Churches are not grown by money. In fact, money is often a deterrent to growth. It is a deterrent because we develop the thinking that if we give a lot of money, we do not have to give a lot of personal time. We lead ourselves to believe that our giving takes the place of our personal involvement. Will a church house full of great givers grow? I think a general survey across the American church scene answers this question. Zero growth indicates zero personal involvement. The richer the givers of the church, the smaller the personal involvement on the part of the givers. After all, the rich did not become rich because they put a lot of time into the lives of those who would produce no wealth for them.

### **E. Let's make time for Jesus!**

Many brethren in Third World cultures will not understand this point. In fact, they will be surprised as they read through the scenario of how the average member of the urban activity-oriented Western culture keeps himself or herself busy with so many events that there is no time to be involved with spiritual matters that lead to personal spiritual growth, and subsequently growth in the church.

This is the whirlwind of Western life. Soccer mom is up in the morning around 5:00 or 6:00. Breakfast and kids. It's cereal out of a box. No cooked breakfast in this house. Dad is somewhere in this picture, if indeed he has not already headed to the office. But the whirlwind begins early in the morning. Eat. Dress. Get packed. Kids off to school. Mom off to her work. School and work all day for parents and children.

Evening comes and children then have soccer, cheerleading practice, baseball, basketball, football, etc. Mom runs kids here and there to every imaginable event. Dad is still at work. Some event is planned for every night of the week, some

**Activity  
For Jesus  
Will Produce  
Spiritual And  
Numerical Growth.**

sport, some activity. Westerners are terrified about being bored. When there is no event, then there are 200 to 300 – maybe it’s 400 by now – TV channels to fill in the gaps. You can flip through the channels until your finger is numb. There is an unending assortment of entertainment opportunities to keep one’s mind occupied. This activity-oriented culture is a 24-7 phenomenon of the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which has been intensified in the 21<sup>st</sup>. Then we scream out, “I don’t have time for anything!” “Why isn’t this church growing?” Or do we even ask this question anymore?

Now try to get one of these modern activist bees involved in teaching someone the gospel on Tuesday night. Or, try to take someone as this away from their schedule to be personally involved in a family that lives on the other side of the tracks in the low-income part of town. When you have filled your own life with activities you enjoy, you have no time for that which grows the church. Now when you have a whole church group with this type of schedule in their personal lives, then why do we complain about the church not growing? And when our children just go away from Jesus when they grow up, can we blame them for following the example of their parents who were more concerned about them competing in a ball game than in learning to quote Scriptures in a Bible class? When we make social events more important than Jesus events, what do we expect? Churches do not grow in these cultures when members have no time to be involved in those things that cause churches to grow. Is that so difficult to comprehend?

In order to correct the problem people need to slow down. We need to learn again how important it is to meditate upon the word of God day and night. We need to learn to be still for Jesus. As parents, we must show our children that working for Jesus is far more important than

working for our own pleasures. We can do this.

## **F. Let's get back to personal relationships!**

When we slow down for Jesus, relationships start being more important than activities. The latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a massive growth in urban centers throughout the world. This has led to the depopulation of the rural areas in some parts of the world. Every time I journey to my homelands of central rural Kansas, I often stand on a parcel of land in the countryside where I grew up. I try to remember where different farm houses once stood. When I was just head high to full grown wheat there were about two to three houses on every square mile of countryside. Before my lifetime, there were more. In fact, the booming years of central Kansas were at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Stafford, Kansas, the town around which I grew up, was booming between 1910 and 1930. But that has all changed. Now there is about one farm house to a square mile of land. All the children of the farmers have moved to the big cities. Even Stafford, Kansas struggles to stay alive with about 1,200 residents. Central rural America has depopulated.

And so it has been throughout the world. In Africa, over fifty percent of the population of the continent now lives in large metropolitan centers. When I lived in Brazil in the early 70s, there were in that country at the time over one hundred cities with populations of over 100,000. Sao Paulo, the city in which I lived, was eleven million in 1978. It is over twenty million today. Urbanization was a global phenomenon of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There was a vast migration of populations from the rural areas to the cities. That migration continues today as urban centers grow.

Urbanization has not been good for Africa. As people moved to the cities, moral values disintegrated. Crime in large urban centers of Africa is a major sociological problem. There seems to be no end to this problem. As urban centers continue to grow, residents find it difficult to build moral values that make it possible to dwell together as they did in a rural setting. The social environment becomes very hostile and urban citizens

emotionally move away from one another.

In the Third World, unemployment is the curse of the modern urban center. Young people scurry to the cities in hope of finding jobs. In Sao Paulo hundreds of thousands of people in search of jobs were migrating to that city alone in the 70s. But there were not enough jobs to go around. Slums developed. Crime subsequently became the curse of the city as people sought to survive. The same has happened in Africa.

I have lived on three continents and in large urban centers of those continents. What I am about to say, therefore, is not taken from some highly engineered survey or Gallup poll. It is simply practical observation taken from years of experience in church growth. Most of my experience has been in Latin America and Africa. Therefore, my postulations are focused primarily around these cultures, though I believe the same holds true of India where the church has also grown.

What I have seen is that the church grows tremendously in the rural areas, but struggles in the large urban centers of Third World countries. In Africa, over four churches are being established every day. However, **by far the vast majority of these churches are being established in the rural areas.** The same was true in Brazil in the 70s. Though much of the mission outreach from American churches focused on large urban centers, the reality of church growth was in the rural areas. We sent out missionaries with the philosophy of reaching the masses by going first to the urban centers. But the reality of church growth was the opposite. The church grew in the rural areas while churches in urban centers struggled to be established.

**Relationships Diminish  
In Large Urban Centers.**

There are a number of reasons for this. The normal rural resident of the world has more time for God. Struggle for survival in large urban centers is difficult. It takes a great deal of time just to maintain a job in a Third World urban center. The focus of the urbanite is on the glamor of the city and one's occupation, whereas the focus of the rural dweller is more on relationships. Urbanites have distant relationships. Those

who live in farming communities have a work ethic. There are no 8:00 to 5:00 jobs in the rural communities. It is a life-style of work, whereas urban dwellers have more of a work-and-play world view.

**Would You Rather Be  
Poor And Personal  
Or Rich And Reclusive?**

Here is the point. Getting urban disciples personally involved in good works and evangelism is rather challenging. In rural settings, however, because the culture is more relationship based, it is easier to stimulate personal involvement. In Africa during the dry season, the land is idle, and thus the church can get to work. I suppose there are a number of other reasons for the rapid growth of the church in rural areas. But the fact remains that rural churches in Africa are booming, whereas urban churches are struggling.

One of the worldwide efforts to turn this trend around in urban centers is the establishment of small groups of disciples throughout urban centers. These are usually referred to as cell groups, life groups or house churches. These groups are more community oriented, and thus offer Christians in urban centers the opportunity of working for the Lord in their immediate area. This is better than trying to transport themselves, and those with whom they are working, across a large urban center in order to do the work of the Lord. The small groups are relational oriented, and being such, individual needs are serviced by each one in the group. House churches in large urban centers give people an opportunity to once again have close relationships.

**The Lazy Run  
From Small Groups.**

I see small groups as the hope for evangelism in the large urban centers of the world. I also see this as the hope for the function of the church. After arriving home from work at 6:00<sup>pm</sup> or 7:00<sup>pm</sup> by bus and taxi, one is not encouraged to bus and taxi off to some distant meeting of the church across the city. The small house group in one's own community offers the privilege of just walking down the street to fellowship with others who are also tired from the day's work. No program of work is necessary. Sincere people simply meet together, and church happens.

There is a simplicity about the small group that is difficult for the highly organized individual to understand. But the simplicity is the key. The house group meeting is a time and environment for the overstressed to find community in the lives of a few disciples who seek to serve Jesus.

## G. Let's get evangelistic!

The preceding points culminate into this one summary point. **Churches grow because the gospel is being preached to unbelievers.** When no one is being baptized, then no one is teaching the lost. If a church is not working in good works and evangelism, therefore, it is not growing.

I realize that we all know these things. But the problem is why have we developed in the past few decades a churchianity that leaves us comfortable with an unevangelistic spirit and a life void of good works? Why do we feel fine when we have hired our professionals to do the evangelism while we sit idly by on a comfortable pew singing, "Soldiers of Christ Arise." Or do we even sing that song anymore? When we sing, "Send the Light," while sittin' tight, why would we expect the church to grow? Dead churches are not growing simply because the members do not have a passion for souls. They have lost their fear of the Lord in final judgment. Paul wrote, "*Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men*" (2 Co 5:11). Where has all the fear gone?

**True Disciples Are  
Fishers Of Men.**

You will ask the question, "Can a dead church revive and start growing again when plagued with professionalism, an unevangelistic spirit, secular activity, and an assembly oriented concept of Christianity that is confined inside the walls of a building?" Absolutely not! There is no hope for such a church. You can argue all you want about my negative conclusion, but keep in mind that such a church has had its lampstand removed. It is no longer a church of Christ. It is a religion that has been created after the desires of those who are members of this religious social club. If you have been sitting in the pew of one of these churches

for the past thirty years, and have experienced the decline in attendance, your argument that this church will grow again has little weight. Dead churches just do not turn around if they feel they can continue with their same thinking that brought them to death.

You will rebut, “The Lord can turn this church around.” But you have missed the point. Jesus took the lampstand out years ago. **It is no longer the Lord’s church!** That’s the problem. Dead churches are churches that have been created after the desires of men, not Jesus. And without Jesus, there is no turning around. Churches always die before the last attendee out the door turns off the lights.

<p><b>No Commitment, No conversions.</b></p>
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But before you get to the last flip of the light switch, consider three New Testament cases of dying and dead churches.

**1. Death in Ephesus:** You already know the details of the history of this church. Great beginning. Great growth. Inspired letter of instruction. Personal visits by a Christ-sent apostle. They had all the blessings and opportunities of a miracle-filled beginning. But death set in. Somewhere along the life line of their existence they lost their first love (Rv 2:4). They died. But remember, the disciples were still there in Ephesus when the pronouncements of Revelation 2 were made. I am sure there were still disciples meeting throughout the city of Ephesus. Nevertheless, Jesus boomed from heaven, **“Remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and will remove your lampstand out of its place – unless you repent”** (Rv 2:5). I wonder what preacher got fired because he preached this sermon on Sunday morning?

In each of the messages to the seven churches of Asia in Revelation 2 & 3, the message is concluded with the statement, *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”* The statement reminds us of what Paul said years before. *“For the time will come when they will not endure sound teaching. But to suit their itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires”* (2 Tm 4:3). Well, that time had come in

Ephesus. And it has come to many churches today. When we create a Christianity after our own desires, there is no desire to repent and do the first works. This is why I say that a dead church will not start growing again. First of all, it does not realize that it is dead. Secondly, if it does realize that it is dead, their corrupted view of what true Christianity is will not generate growth.

**There Is No Resurrection  
For An  
Unrepentant Church.**

Only total repentance in the lives of the majority will change the situation. What I have found, however, is that a few in the midst of the majority discover that death has set in. But the minority who realize the death, are shouted out of fellowship by the majority who still believe that all continues to be well in Zion.

Ephesus was not yet totally dead, and thus, there was a glimmer of hope. The call to repentance was made because there was still hope. But if there is no full scale repentance on the part of the whole of a dead church, it is doomed to destruction, though still meeting under the beautiful light of a chandelier.

**2. *Death in Sardis:*** The problem with the church in the Sardis church was pride. “*You have a name that you live*” (Rv 3:1). They had made a name for themselves. They did everything in their name. Their name was known in the community. The next time you think about doing something in order that the name of your church gets the credit, think about what Jesus said to this church. We do all in the name of Jesus, not in the name of the church, for we are the church. But in their

**A Church Can Be Dead  
While The Members  
Think They Are Alive.**

pride as the church of the community, Jesus pronounced, “***But you are dead***” (Rv 3:1). They were dead while they thought they had a great name in the community. Can

churches with great names in a community actually be dead?

Dead churches that have great names in the community will have their lampstand removed. The problem is that they think they are alive. And when one thinks the church is alive, when it is actually dead, then there is no remorse for repentance. So can dead churches that have

great names survive? Again, absolutely not! When we take pride in our name, we feel no cause for repentance lest we endanger our “good” name. We will also keep our preachers and teachers in line lest they become too bold or direct with their messages. Dead churches do not want to do anything that would cause the community to think that they are “fundamental” or “radical” with their message and work.

**3. *Death in Laodicea:*** When you are hot for Jesus, you know that you are on the right track. When you are cold, you know you need to repent. We know that repentance will correct coldness. But with the Laodicea church a very common problem is set forth. *“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth”* (Rv 3:15,16).

The problem about being lukewarm is that you think you are fine. There is no feeling for repentance. And this is where many churches are today. There are no good works taking place among the members. There is no evangelism, no one is being baptized. Since the “staff” is hired for performances that deal with the maintenance of the members, then they are not evangelistic. They can be full-time without the pressures of being evangelistic in the community. As long as they perform for the members, all is well. Their example filters down to the membership, and thus the lukewarm church is dead. It feels no need for repentance. Such churches proclaim, *“I am rich and increase with goods and have need of nothing”* (Rv 3:17). Jesus would pronounce upon them the indictment, ***“But you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked”*** (Rv 3:17). Lukewarm churches never repent because they see no need for such. So ask me again, “Will dead churches start growing again?” How can they when they do not know that they are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked? Before we can mourn over our sin, we must realize that we are in sin.

**Lukewarm Members  
Think They Are  
On Heaven’s Road.**

Being cold is better than being lukewarm. At least in our coldness

we know that we are not what we should be. We may have turned Jesus off completely in our lives, but at least we know that. Being lukewarm with a churchianity that is void of good works and evangelism is a curse that will lead to eternal doom. If one finds himself in the midst of a lukewarm church that is void of good works and an evangelistic spirit, look to Jesus. He says to you, *“I counsel you to buy from Me gold tested in the fire so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed. And I will anoint your eyes with eye salve so that you may see”* (Rv 3:18).

**The Parables Speak  
Of Doing Work,  
Not Of  
Theological Dogma.**

As disciples of Jesus we must work the works of God. We must be fishers of men, committed to the edification of the body of Christ, and sacrificially living for the benefit of humanity. All the parables of Jesus focused on doing something – or not doing something. Jesus’ focus was not on theological debates in the parables. Jesus wanted his disciples known for doing things for others, not on winning theological arguments. We must thus work for all men, but especially for the household of faith.

**When We Go To Work  
For God,  
God Goes To Work For Us.**

In being this way, there is true happiness. In the final hours Jesus was with His disciples before the cross, He took a towel and washed all their feet (Jn 13:1-17). He gave them an example of service. He concluded by saying, *“If you know these things, **happy are you if you do them**”* (Jn 13:17). Happiness comes from having a dirty towel. If we know the example of Jesus, and do what He did, then we will be happy. God made us this way. When we do good to others, we reap the serendipity . . . happiness.

It is through the spirit of service for others that we make it through this world. Christianity, therefore, is a faith that is manifested through loving service. If we have not understood this about Christianity, then we have developed a churchian theology that is sold to unhappy people as the real thing. Church houses are full of people who are unhappy simply because they have been led to believe that Christianity is a sys-

tem of doctrinal theology that is void of good works. It is the challenge of church leaders, therefore, to restore the love by which Jesus said His disciples would be identified. When this loving service is restored, then we are the true church of Christ. But until then, we will always be living with a cheap copy of what is the true.