

THE MESSENGER



“... How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!” Romans 10:15

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On Doing Our Duty

by Randy Harshbarger

Countless sermons by many preachers have gone forth about the need to do one's duty. Bible classes bolster this perceived lack among New Testament Christians by setting forth the requirements God revealed in his word. Doing, working, laboring – all legitimate expressions of faithfulness to the Lord – are many times extolled as the sum of what Christianity is all about. That is, if we can just get the doing down right (attendance, giving, etc.), then our relationship with the Lord is secure. We must remember that we are laborers in the vineyard; we are workers for the Lord; we must “work out our own salvation” (Phil. 2:13-14). But what emphasis do we place on our motivation for doing what we do?

For example, why do you tell the truth? You might respond: “I tell the truth, because if I don't, I will go to hell.” And you would be right unless, of course, you repented of your lie (Rev. 21:8). Yes, the threat of punishment is a great deterrent. Should we, though, in our service to the Lord, move beyond the possibility of being punished to a higher, greater motivation? Ancient philosophers advocated telling the truth because it was dishonest to lie. To lie was beneath the dignity of man, opposed to a virtuous life, and never led to the perfection of one's life (see “Duty” in *The Great Ideas: A Lexicon of Western Thought* by Mortimer Adler 161ff.). Yes, we are obligated to obey the Lord's will. But why do we obey? Is it merely out of the dreadful fear of being lost in hell? To act out our obedience to the Lord on solely pragmatic terms produces no real joy in our lives. Serving God becomes a drudgery. Are we content to live simply on the level of “have to” rather than “want to?”

Psalm 122:1 says: “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go unto the house of Jehovah.” There is some debate about whether this Psalm comes from David; some understand it to indicate the happiness of worship on the part of many Jews as they made their way to the temple in Jerusalem to worship. Regardless, the sentiment expressed is one of joy and happiness about the blessed opportunity to serve God in his holy place. One can imagine the throngs of Jews traversing the rugged terrain of Palestine, making their way to the Holy City. Along the way, neighbors would be invited to join them in their spiritual trek. With great anticipation, they came into the presence of God. They reveled in their association with fellow worshipers. It was a joyous time. Were there set, prescribed feasts the Jews had to observe in Jerusalem? Yes! Do you get the idea from reading Psalm 122 that those involved were being coerced into their activities? No!

I John 5:3 says: “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.” Joyful service grows out of the new relationship we share in Christ. We are begotten of God (I John 5:1). The new life we have in Christ produces not only a desire to do God’s will, but the power to carry through in our devotion to him. Our love for God is demonstrated when we do his will. It is natural for parents to love their children; that love is reciprocated by the children. Just so, God’s love for us results in our love for God. Our obedience to the Lord is not burdensome or grievous or difficult. Jesus promised a light and easy yoke (Matt. 11:27-30). The unreasonable and impossible demands of the Pharisees give way to the joyous opportunity to obey the Lord’s will. Wise sons, with delight, obey wise fathers. It may not always be easy to do what God commands, but his will is not beyond our ability to do. Along the way he provides help (Phil. 4:13). And so, even the most exacting of demands become easy.

A young boy was carrying his crippled sibling on his back. “Isn’t that load too heavy for you?” “No,” the boy replied. “He’s not heavy, he’s my brother.” An anxious mother sits by the hospital bed that contains her fevered daughter. Not once does that mother look at the clock. And not once do committed Christians quibble about what they have to do in service to the Lord. Jesus never complained about his death on the cross for you and me. It was “for joy” that he ran the race. Let’s do our duty as we ought to do.

NOTES & NEWS: Remember to check the prayer list for those with ongoing spiritual weaknesses and physical illnesses. *“...Pray for one another...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” James 5:16*