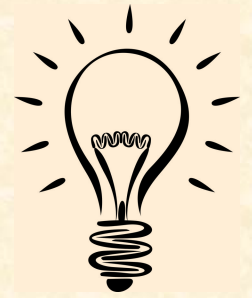


The Christian Light

Editor - Mitch Sparks



“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).

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PUTTING FORTH OUR BEST

Barry O'Dell – Mammoth Spring church of Christ –
Mammoth Spring, AR

I heard a statement recently in a secular lecture about work ethic and effort: “*The lack of our best hurts everyone around us.*” Let’s develop that concept in a couple different ways. What about an employee who does not put forth his best effort at work? His co-workers will have to take up his slack. His lack of production will hurt the company at large. He may lose his job and, in turn, now his family is suffering because of a lack of income. The Bible certainly teaches a work ethic. For instance, Paul wrote, “*that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing*” (1 Thess. 4:11-12). He also wrote, “*Let him who stole, steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need*” (Eph. 4:28).

What about a spiritual application of this principle? Matthew 20:1-16 records a parable of Jesus that is called “The Workers in the Vineyard.” The Kingdom of Heaven/church is compared to a landowner who was looking to hire “*laborers*” to work in his fields (Matt. 20:1). If we make the proper spiritual application to this parable, we will understand that the church of Christ is a place of labor. It is the case that God expects His people to be productive in His cause. However, the church is not a forced-labor camp. The landowner was looking to hire people who would agree to a certain wage and then get to work (Matt. 20:2). While this parable seems to be more about the justice of God (because He paid everyone according to their agreement – 20:13-15) than the concept of work ethic, it does teach the necessity of working for God.

The Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25:14-30) is a parable directed more at the work ethic of the individual. The men who were entrusted with five and two talents were faithful in the fulfillment of their duties (25:20-23). The owner of the goods commended them for being “*good and faithful*” with their stewardship. The man who had been given one talent was condemned, not for being a thief or a prodigal. Rather, he was condemned because he was “*lazy*” (25:26). While he didn’t lose what had been given to him, he put forth no effort in developing what he had. It would be fair to conclude that the first two individuals put forth their best effort and were told, “*Enter into the joy of your lord*” (25:21, 23).

The church, the vineyard of Christ, is a place of labor. What the child of God must understand is that the Father expects our best effort in service to Him. We are all familiar with passages such as Romans 3:9 that says, “*For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.*” What has happened many times is that people will take that to mean that we are all sinners and just cannot do any better. Nothing could be further from the truth! While it is true that not one of us is without sin, it is just as true that we can all put forth our best effort in service to God.

The concept is that of sacrifice. We will sacrifice some things in life to obtain others. We may sacrifice time with our family in order to work longer hours so we can buy something we really want. We may sacrifice our favorite foods because we have a desire to reach a certain weight. The examples could go on and on. Think about sacrifices mentioned in the Bible. Abraham offered his son of promise to God and proved his steadfastness to God (Gen. 22:1-19). David, when offered a place for sacrifice free of charge said, “*No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God with that which costs me nothing*” (2 Sam. 24:24). In connection with service to Christ we read this, “*If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple*” (Lk. 14:26).

The teaching here is that nothing is to come before God – not even family. Then He added, “*And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple*” (Lk. 14:27). The word *cannot* was translated from a Greek word that is an absolute negative. In other words, there is no possible way to be a disciple of Christ if any one of those things come before Him. Then, Luke 14:33 reads, “*So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.*” In this passage is taught the concept of sacrifice being commitment. Whether Abraham or David or us today, if there is no sacrifice offered in order to commit ourselves to God and His work, we are not offering our best and cannot offer our best.

Paul wrote, “*Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful*” (1 Cor. 4:1-2). While it is true that not one of us is above sin, it is also true that we are all capable of being faithful in our service to God. To be faithful is to be trustworthy and dependable. Is that an accurate description of our service to God? Are we giving our best to Him? Or, are we offering to God that which costs us nothing? Our bodies are to be offered as “*living sacrifices*” (Rom. 12:1-2). There again is the principle of sacrifice and commitment. If we are committed to giving our best to God, we have to count the cost (Lk. 14:25-33) and be willing to sacrifice whatever would prohibit us from doing just that.

WHY IS THE GOSPEL GOOD NEWS?

*Aaron Dodson – Washington Ave. church of Christ -
Jonesboro, AR*

The people of the world are sinking fast — mentally, spiritually, and emotionally. Society is suffering greatly because of sinful choices and behaviors (cf. Prov. 14:34)! I advocate for godly civil leaders and moral legislation in federal and local governments (cf. Prov. 29:2) but ultimately no one person besides Jesus Christ can “cure” the ills of sin (cf. Rom. 6:23). With sin and its consequences comes negativity, and of all people, Christians should not be negative! The Gospel of Jesus Christ is good news and there are many reasons why it is good!

The Gospel is Good News because without it there’s terrible news. Sin [transgression of God’s law] apparently occurred initially among God’s free will angels (Jude 6; 2 Pet. 2:5) which led to the first humans being tempted to shirk God’s instructions and authority

(cf. Gen. 3:6). Sin corrupted the earth and mankind (Gen. 3; Rom. 8:21-22). The world of Genesis 1-2 is radically different than the world of Genesis 3. One with precious sweet fellowship (Gen. 1-2) and another with hiding, shame and sin (Gen. 3:6ff). Sin had dire consequences — death, suffering, pain, anguish, etc. Without the Good News of Jesus Christ there is absolutely no hope in life here and in the life to come. The Good News — the person and work of Jesus — is an absolute necessity (cf. Rom. 6:23)!

The Gospel is Good News because it provides spiritual debt relief (cf. Rom. 6:23). The wages of sin is eternal separation from God but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ! Because of sin we owe a debt we can’t pay off. We cannot remove the debt. Someone says “O, but I’m a good person.” God says that “being good” does not relieve the debt! Only the Gospel relieves the debt of sin (cf. Rom. 1:16)! Jesus payed the price for sin not our good deeds (cf. Mt. 20:28).

The Gospel is Good News because there is an eternal heavenly reward (cf. Mt. 25:46). God is eternal, He has no beginning and no end. As humans we are His offspring possessing an immortal soul (cf. Acts 17:29; Gen. 1:26). Christians partake of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:3-4). The Good News leads to a home in heaven with God — Heaven is being with God forever! The opposite of heaven with God is hell and torments with Satan (cf. Mt. 25:41, 46).

The Gospel is Good News because it can give us a clean conscience (Heb. 9:14; 10:22; 13:18). Our conscience is our divinely given warning device that reacts to sin and produces accusation and guilt. When one violates God’s written will [i.e., the Gospel], the conscience has guilt. Over time through much sin and false ideas regarding God and sin, the conscience can become seared (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1). The Hebrews writer wrote that the sacrifice of Jesus is able to render the conscience clean and forgiven. When we by faith are baptized into Christ for the remission of sins our conscience is cleared (1 Peter 3:21; cf. Acts 2:38).

From the Editor: If you or the congregation where you attend would like to receive this publication, please send us an email to msparks0384@gmail.com and in the subject line “**Sign Up for The Christian Light.**” Thanks, Mitch Sparks



NORTH EAS ARKANSAS --- NEWS & INFO

GOSPEL MEETINGS:

Nettleton church of Christ – Jonesboro, AR
(Oct. 3-6, 2021) Speaker: B.J. Clarke

Washington Avenue church of Christ – Jonesboro, AR
(Oct. 17-20, 2021) Speaker: Tim Kidwell

Lepanto church of Christ – Lepanto, AR
(Oct. 17-21, 2021) Begins @ 7 P.M. each night
Speakers:

Oct. 17 – Dwayne Butler – The Day He Died

Oct. 18 – Matthew Martin – The Reason Why

Oct. 19 – Taylor Kubala – The Life He Lived

Oct. 20 – Josh Kennedy – The Words He Speaks

Oct. 21 – David Riley – The Call He Cries