

Be Zealous for Good Works

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We have all heard of the familiar saying “going through the motions,” and most of us have probably been guilty of this at one point or another in our service to God. I know that my spiritual life has been filled with mountains of zeal at times and valleys of sin other times. When I think of this idea of “going through the motions,” one particular thought comes to my mind immediately: being lukewarm and the waters around Laodicea.

When we look at the city of Laodicea and the surrounding geography and compare it to the church at Laodicea and the relationship these Christians had with God, we are provided with a marvelous analogy, which we can meditate on (Rev. 3:14-22). The city of Laodicea was highly dependent on outside sources for water; Laodicea received water from two nearby sources, the therapeutic hot water of Hierapolis and the refreshing cold water of Colossae. It is believed that the mixing of these two sources of water reflected the state of the city’s water source and is probably what Jesus was comparing the works of the Christians at Laodicea to. Jesus clearly shows how He feels about being lukewarm when He tells the church at Laodicea that “...because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot. I will vomit you out of My mouth (Rev. 3:16).” We can see here the importance of being zealous to do good works. If we are not zealous to do good works we will be rejected by God.

There are several important points we can learn from this passage, the first being that God expects us to be zealous for good works. We know that we are to be lights to the world and that our good works will bring glory to God (Matt. 5:14-16), and this passage reinforces this point. The next point is that Jesus loves us and rebukes us to change and become zealous for the good works He requires of us (Rev. 3:19). If we remember that Jesus loves us and is there to help us, changing from lukewarm to zealous becomes possible. The final point is that Jesus is waiting at the door and knocking, and whoever opens the door He will come in and dine with and he who overcomes will sit with Jesus on His throne (Rev. 3:20-21). If we do not open the door for Jesus we will not be zealous for the good works that Jesus demands of us, and we will be vomited out of His mouth and will not sit on His throne with Him.

In conclusion, in the epistle to Titus, Paul writes that Jesus gave Himself for us that He might have a peculiar people, zealous of good works (Titus 2:14). When we look at these two passages together we get a clear picture of how uncommon it is to find a person zealous for good works. This person will be considered peculiar by others but they will dine with Jesus and sit on His throne in the end. I encourage all of you to examine yourselves and to honestly question your heart to see if you are lukewarm or zealous for good works. If you are lukewarm, repent and be zealous (Rev. 3:19). If you are zealous

for good works, continue in all humility remembering always that Jesus holds the keys of Hades and of Death (Rev. 1:18).

Kne(e)-mail

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With technology always on the rise, the days of dial-up Internet are just a figment of our imagination. With the new cable modem/DSL, the days of playing a nice game of solitaire to pass the time as our network connected to the Internet are long gone. Now with the incredible speed at which the Internet and computers operate, the use of the “World Wide Web” has grown into a monumental role in our daily routines. One of the leading ways to communicate information is through the use of e-mails. E-mails have become an essential part in messaging our amigos.

But even though this technology has come such a long way and as vital as e-mails are to us, we’ve always had the quickest and most important form of communication of all. There is a type of communication that has always connected us to the other end; a type of communication that is direct; a type of communication with zero delay. This communication is none other than the gift of prayer, which we all have through our Savior, Jesus Christ. “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’” (John 14:6).

The incredible gift of prayer is our greatest tool by which we express our mind, our desires, and our thoughts to God. “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6). This gift which God has given to us must also be used as a fundamental weapon in the spiritual warfare we face every day in our young zealous lives. “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41). We see this same idea again when Christ speaks to his disciples at Mount of Olives saying, “Pray that you may not fall into temptation” (Luke 22:40). And shortly after, we find Christ submitting to God in prayer saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove his cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42). Even though we know God didn’t remove the cup from Him through His reverence, He was strengthened, “In the days of the flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence” (Hebrews 5:7). “And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him” (Luke 22:43).

Just like Christ, let us continue to go to our Father as we submissively bow to him on our knees. Let us have the faith to know that whatever we speak, God is listening to His children. “Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them” (Mark 11:24). Again the Bible says, “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the

Lord” (James 1:6-7).

This month will conclude my first year as a new Christian. I know that prayer has been the biggest and most instrumental part of my new life in Christ. The thought of the many prayers the Father has answered for me continues to “blow my mind.” “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:12-13).

The Christian’s Vote

Ryan Dillard

The bright, green leaves of summer will soon make their ruddy transition as cool air begins to swell around us. Fall is near. With a new fall comes a renewed wave of responsibility. This fall is an election year. God has granted our country the blessing of choice in leadership. Not to say that God is without control of who leads the nations of the world. To think otherwise would be vanity. However, we do have an opportunity and obligation to make a difference.

For many of you this will be your first time to vote in an election. You’re either out of school now or will be by next May. Your mind is fresh, independent, and easily influenced. The latter is not necessarily bad unless you are not aware of who or what you are being influenced by. Our voting obligation is not just for the “first timer,” but for every Christian who is eligible at any age. My purpose in this writing is to explore a couple of issues of morality that today’s Christian voter will face at the polls.

Abortion and homosexual rights/marriage are the issues at hand. These abominations, among others, not only threaten the furtherance of God’s word, but are also detrimental to our country’s social direction. Therefore, we have a duty to be informed of who we are voting for. We should examine not only the presidential candidates, but also our state and local officials.

First, let’s examine the case against abortion. Psalms 139:13 (ASV) says, “*For thou didst form my inward parts: Thou didst cover me in my mother’s womb.*” God’s human creation begins in the womb. He has intricately designed and molded us. Job also supported this fact in Job 31:15. Ecclesiastes 11:5 (KJV) states, “*As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit (wind in ASV), nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.*” The word “spirit” or “wind” used in this verse is defined as **breath** by both Vine’s Expository Dictionary and Strong’s Greek/Hebrew Definitions. This word *ruach*, or *ruwach*, is used in reference to both the physical wind that blows and the spirit, or breath which indicates life. Ecclesiastes 11:4 spoke of the wind that blows. Every version translates *ruach* in verse 4 as *wind*. However, in verse 5 the word is used in conjunction to the formation of human life in the womb. Only the King James Version translates *ruach* in verse 5 as *spirit*. I believe this is a clear indication that life begins while in the womb.

Let's turn back the pages of our Old Testament and blow the dust off of Exodus 21, specifically verse 22. Under the old law punishment was rendered on anyone who harmed a woman with child in such a way "*that her fruit departs from her.*" Further down the chapter God instructed "*life for life, eye for eye...*" We are no longer instructed to take this form of action, but the point here is that the death of an unborn child was the same as the death of anyone else. If the death of an unborn child is the same as any other death, then to kill an unborn child is murder. Jesus explicitly informed us in Matthew 19:18 that murder is against His commandments. Knowing this, as a Christian, is it not important to research who we are voting for? How could we consciously vote for a candidate that is "pro-choice?"

Next we'll throw homosexuality under the microscope. Contrary to the ACLU, MTV, the media, and being "politically correct," **you do not have to accept homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle.** Furthermore, the Bible says you **cannot** accept it. Paul tells the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 6:9 that homosexuals (abusers of themselves with men/mankind) are unrighteous and will not inherit the kingdom of God. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of their wickedness of which homosexuality was a large part of. God created marriage for a purpose. He designed it to be a relationship between one man and one woman with specific rules (1 Cor. 7:1-14). Verse 2 of this passage says, "*let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.*" The Hebrew and Greek definitions for the words *wife* and *husband* support that they are two opposite genders. Looking at verses 12-14, the bond of marriage doesn't only apply to Christians, but also to non-believers.

The purpose of marriage is not solely for our pleasure. God instituted marriage to bring glory to Christ as the bridegroom of the church, His bride (Eph. 5:23-33). John the Baptist made reference to this relationship in John 3:28-30 when he told some of his disciples and the Jews that Christ must *increase* while he (John) must *decrease*. John told them that Christ has the bride and is the bridegroom. Paul makes perfectly clear our role as the church in submitting ourselves to Christ. If homosexuality is an abomination, and marriage is a holy union representative of Christ being head over the church, then how could homosexuality have anything to do with marriage? How could we as Christians vote for a candidate that supports gay rights or gay marriage?

I encourage every Christian and every American to think about these issues before choosing your candidates. While the two issues we discussed here are major slams against the Bible, be attentive to every aspect of a candidate for anything they would support that violates God's law. All sin is sin and there is not one greater than another. Be aware of the works of the flesh/unrighteous as outlined in 1 Cor. 6:9-10 and Gal. 5:19-21. We should not support these things or have anything to do with them.

A good place to start in finding out information on political candidates is www.ontheissues.org. This website has extensive history on hundreds of candidates and current officials beginning at the state level. Consult your local party headquarters or city hall for information on county/city elections.

"If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." (Gal. 5:25)

Where Are The Dead?

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This question is imperative and needs to be answered based on the truth or inspired words – the Bible (John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). The Bible provides the answer on this given question.

Man is mortal. All of us will die. Hebrew 9:27 says, “...it is appointed unto men once to die...” The biblical definition of death is “a separation.” From Vine’s Expository Dictionary of the New Testament Words, page 278, the word “death” is came from the Greek word “*thanatos*.” It means (a) the separation of the soul (the spiritual part of man) from the body (the material part), the latter ceasing to function and turning to dust; (b) the separation of man from God; Adam died on the day he disobeyed God, Genesis 2:17, and all mankind are in a like situation when we sin. From this clarification, we clearly conclude that the word death means a separation. Man’s death is either physical or spiritual.

Man consists of a body and soul. Death occurs when eternal soul departs from the physical body. James 2:26 says, “...the body without the spirit is dead...” The spirit and the soul are used interchangeably many times, referring to the inward man that bears the image of God. But when they are used together (I Thess. 5:23), the soul refers to the animal life. Genesis 2:7 says, “...and man became a living soul.” The spirit is the part made in the image of God. Man’s spirit bears the image of God. Genesis 1:26–27 reads, “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness ... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him...” We look like God in that we have intelligence, emotions, and the power of choice or will. Animals, though they have life, do not possess these qualities; but man does, and this makes us unique! Because man has free will, the power of choice, we are morally accountable creatures. Man’s body is made from the dust of the ground. Genesis 2:7 says, “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground...” Dust is a common element that comes from the earth. Man’s physical body formed from the earth and to the earth our bodies will return. Ecclesiastes 12:7a reads, “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was...” At death (a separation), the body goes to the grave, and the inward man (spirit or soul) returns to God who gave it; i.e. it comes under his control and places it in the part of Hades that it belongs, comfort or torment. Ecclesiastes 12:7b says, “...and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.”

Where are the dead? They are in Hades! The Bible teaches that there is a place in the spiritual realm called Hades. The Old Testament refers to it as Sheol. This is the place of departed spirits. This is where the spirit of man goes when it is separated from the physical body at death. Man’s physical body (outward) is buried in the ground, but the eternal part of man continues to exist in Hades.

The King James Version (KJV) uses the English word “Hell” to translate “Hades” and “Gehenna.” Gehenna is the place of eternal punishment for the wicked and unrighteous.

The word Gehenna occurs 12 times in New Testament. Each time it is translated as "Hell" (Matt. 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; 23:15, 33; Mk 9:43, 45, 47, and others). Hades is the place of departed spirits awaiting judgment. Hades is a temporary place. One must look to the context if the KJV is speaking of Hades or Gehenna.

The best teaching that we have on Hades is the account of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. We find here that Hades is a place for both the righteous and the wicked. The part of the righteous is called "Abraham's Bosom" and "Paradise" (Luke 16:22-23, 25-26; 23:43). The part of the wicked is called "Torment" and "Tartarus" (Luke 16:24-25; 2 Peter 2:4). There are two conditions: the righteous are comforted, while the wicked are tormented in the flame. The rich man was immediately aware of his condition (v. 24). The rich man recognized Abraham and Lazarus. The rich man could remember the events of his life (vs. 27-28). There was a great gulf fixed between the two realms (v. 26). No one could pass from one to the other. This does away with the false doctrine of purgatory. Man's eternal destiny is sealed at death. To say that a departed loved one is looking down upon us or watching over us from Heaven is false! None of our loved ones are in Heaven now!

Hades is not a permanent place. It will hold the dead until Jesus our Savior returns (John 14:3). Jesus Christ promised a future resurrection of all the dead (John 5:28-29; I Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:1ff). All of mankind will be brought before the Lord and will be judged which will result in a great separation, the judgment day (Acts 17:31; Revelation 20:11-15; Matthew 25:31-46). There will be a destruction of the heaven and earth when Christ returns (2 Peter 3:10-13). The entire physical universe will be destroyed, not just cleansed! These events (Resurrection of all the dead, Destruction of the heaven and earth, and Day of Judgment) are all teachings found in the Holy Bible and will take place at the Lord's return. The Bible indicates that all of these will happen in a moment! After judgment eternity will begin. The lost will be cast into Hell (Gehenna), and the saved will be ushered into Heaven (Matthew 25:46).

Upon death, the soul or spirit of man enters Hades. If he is saved or baptized in water for the remissions of his sins and remains faithful until death, then he enters Paradise in Hades. If he is lost, his soul enters torment. It will remain there until the resurrection of all the dead or when Christ returns. Those who are alive when Christ returns will have no opportunity to repent, for even in torment, there is no hope for repentance. There will be no opportunity to change our fate once we die.

Folks, now is the time to prepare for eternity. Today is the time for you to repent and be baptized for the remissions of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). Are you ready when you die or when Jesus Christ returns?

The Voice of Experience

Senior Life Sketches

Brief Introductions to good old people!

Terry Sumerlin

Life Before Baptism - Fannie Flagg wrote a wonderful novel called, "Standing in the Rainbow." It's about a typical, small town, 50s family. Except for the small town, we could have been that family. I was born in San Antonio, TX and attended elementary, junior high and high school six blocks away, all while living in the same house. My father was a civil service worker at Brooks AFB and my mother was a homemaker. All my growing up years, we attended one local church (S. Flores St. church of Christ which is now Pecan Valley), where my father was a deacon. We assembled with the saints when it came time, and never asked if we were "going to church." It was understood – we were going.

Life After Baptism - While I was in elementary school, Carl Vernon and his family moved to work with the S. Flores St. church in San Antonio. He taught a boy's training class, which I was privileged to attend. Though at that time I had not obeyed the gospel, I was very conscientious and was already discussing the plan of salvation with neighborhood kids. I was eleven when Carl baptized me, and eleven when I gave my first Wednesday night talk. And, though I don't recommend baptism at such a young age, I believe I knew what I was doing. At 17 I began preaching on a fill-in basis, in and around San Antonio, and hardly missed a Sunday preaching for about 30 years. Sherry and I married in 1969, and I did full time preaching in Refugio, TX, Malvern, AR, Freeport, TX and San Antonio, TX. We now make our home in San Antonio and are members of the Garden Ridge congregation. I'm in business as a motivational speaker and author. I also do fill-in preaching and gospel meetings from time to time. Like many Christians, I've received great joy and great heartache from fellow Christians. I struggle with how petty and judgmental we can be. On the other hand, I've been privileged to be associated with great brothers and sisters in Christ and great gospel preachers. One of the greatest, Robert Turner, taught me to put my faith in the Lord and not in men. That advice has served me well. Another wonderful preacher and mentor, W. L. Wharton, taught me how to study the Bible. I owe so much to them and other great men.

Life, Your Counsel To Younger Christians - Looking back as a husband, parent, grandparent and, most of all, a Christian several lessons stand out above all others. First, is the need for a good and honest heart. This not only involves a clean conscience, but also a willingness to learn without bias or preconceived notions. This is really how we form our own convictions. The second lesson has to do with courage: the kind of courage that will cause one to stand alone if truth and righteousness are at stake. The

third principle that comes to mind involves a constant recognition that there is one law-giver and one judge. He is just, but He is also longsuffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). As a young man, I served a God I thought was out to get us. There is little comfort or encouragement in that. Now, I think more in terms of “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you” (Jas.4:8). That’s God’s will for the life that now is, and for that which is to come!