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## Do You Just “Pay and Pray”?

**What does Jesus Christ expect from you as a Christian?  
Do you have a role of any significance within the Church?  
Is there more to your life in Christ than “pay and pray”?**

by James McBride

Many brethren - perhaps scattered around the country, and rarely meeting other brethren - are frustrated by limits they place on their responsibility as an “ordinary member” of the Church. Many focus on a negative sense of being called only to pray for the work of the Church and to support it financially. They feel they ought to be doing more. But what?

There is, of course, no such person as an “ordinary member”! Each of us is unique. Each of us was endowed, at the laying on of hands at our baptism, with one or more spiritual gifts. And we are all expected to identify, develop and use those gifts for the benefit of the Church. Unless all the brethren are active in this way the Church can only hobble along!

What your specific gifts are isn't the point of this letter - that's for another time. What I want to focus on is a matter that is often viewed in the Churches of God with some suspicion. It is an activity that ought, in one form or another, to be very much a part of our Christian walk. It's as much a part of our spiritual life as breathing is to our physical life! And in doing this we bear strong witness for Jesus Christ.

It is, simply, “good works”! For many who profess to be Christian this is a natural action - the Salvation Army is a praiseworthy example. And many others. However the Scriptures don't urge such helpful actions to our fellow man as some kind of “corporate action”. We don't need, in the modern world, to project ourselves in high-profile church-wide social action. Our righteous actions (“alms”) are not to be

publicly flaunted (Matthew 6:1).

Sadly, this text in Matthew 6 has often been used to screen out any “good works”! But you will recall that the apostle Paul urged the Christians in Galatia “as often as you have the opportunity do good to all men... “(ch 6:10). Too often we focus only on the sequel “...especially those of the household of faith”!

Of course, good works however we define them are not the way to salvation. Paul makes that abundantly clear in Ephesians 2. But he also emphasizes that one of the purposes of our new creation in Christ is to do good works (vv. 8-10). Indeed Paul says God planned beforehand that this was what we are to do as Christians (v.10). In doing so we act as a pin-point of light in a dark world. Said Jesus: “Let your light shine before all men that they may see your good deeds and may give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt 5:16).

A useful study for each of us is to search the Scriptures on this vital aspect of Christian living. To the church in general, to the rich, to individuals and to widows the Word of God urges us to “be careful to maintain good works” (Titus 3:8). We are urged to “provoke one another to love and to good works” (Heb 10:24), and to be “zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14). It is the expression of Christ in us.

Jesus “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38), and the Gospels are abundant testimony to his untiring service to humanity. He expressed tenderness towards little

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children. He ministered to the diseased. He fed the hungry. He mourned with the bereaved. All men and women of every class, from the lowest to the greatest, benefitted from the boundless compassion that he expressed. His life projected the whole measure of John 3:16: “God so loved the world that He gave...”!

Are you, then, at least partially unfulfilled as a Christian? Do you want to do more than “pay and pray”? Do you wish to become more directly involved “in the work of God”? Then do good works!

What that will mean for any one of you I don't know. It will depend on your circumstances. It need not involve spending money. It will, however, involve sacrifice. Sacrifice of your precious time, mostly. Sacrifice, perhaps of home comforts on a cold night as you minister with a “soup kitchen”. Sacrifice of a favorite TV soap. But isn't that expressing the life of Christ? He was always ready to serve his fellow man. We're told that he “took on the nature of a slave” (Phil 2:7). And he served to the point of laying down his life.

Whether you are able to minister from your home or are in a position to serve with other organizations “in the field” of human suffering is a matter for each to carefully consider, keeping all legitimate factors (e.g. necessary commitments, safety etc.) in mind.

Whatever way you serve, however you use your natural and spiritual gifts in serving the world you will be reflecting Jesus Christ. Projecting him to others. Laying up treasure in heaven. And bringing solace to mankind for whom Christ died. Remember that during his life Jesus never once ministered to a converted person!

We don't serve to convert - but from compassion. We

don't serve to massage our ego - but we serve from compassion. We don't serve to draw the praise of men - but we do our good works with the same motivation as Jesus Christ, from compassion for suffering mankind.

Certainly nothing should be allowed to hinder our supplications that God will open doors and will otherwise support our work for Him of proclaiming the imminent Kingdom of God. Any “good works” we help with on the Sabbath should allow adequate time for rest, for worship, for study and reflection. But our good works are just as much an expression of faith as are these other vital activities! As the Church of God (UK) we surely have God's “form” of godliness - in our worship and in our teachings. But don't let us become so obsessed with the “form” that we omit the weightier matters of God's instruction to His people!

If we fail to have a proper balance our prayers for this work for God may go unanswered. Notice what Isaiah relayed to ancient Judah: “Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to Me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread forth your hands [in prayer] I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers I will not listen”. He goes on to urge the people to “learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow” (Isaiah 1:14-17). A similar message is conveyed in chapter 58 in regard to the Day of Atonement.

So let's each express the power of Christ to those around us, and to those we can reach out to, through our acts of mercy. Let's all, brethren, in a way our circumstances will permit, be careful and zealous to maintain good works. And, as we have opportunity, let's do good to all men!

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