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LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE BEFORE MEN

We are all familiar with Jesus Christ's instruction 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. (Matthew 5:16)

Jesus Christ started this thought two verses earlier.

You are **the light of the world**. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. (Matthew 5:14)

What does "the light of the world" mean?

This means that true Christians are to "shine" **for the benefit of the world**. Without converted Christians, the world is in total darkness. The world is not capable of generating any light on its own. That was God's conclusion in Genesis 6:5. And since then human beings haven't changed. In this age **the only source** of any real "light" for any nation on earth is the presence of converted Christians, who have the holy spirit dwelling in them.

Consider the expression "**a city set on a hill**", which is a reference to true Christians. A city on a hill is easily seen from far away by anyone **looking in that direction**. But if people are not looking in that direction, then they will also not see that city. True Christians are in a similar position. But mostly the world is not looking "in that direction".

When we repent and submit our lives to God's will, then God is going to place us in situations and in circumstances where **our real character** and **our personality** are going to be seen by those people in the world, who recognize positive character attributes, that is, by people who are looking "in that direction". People outside of God's Church will have the opportunity to see how we handle success, and how we handle failure. They are going to see how we deal with adversity. They will recognize whether we are proud and arrogant, or whether we are humble and kind.

They will see whether we have an uncompromising commitment to our principles, or whether we are willing to compromise when we are exposed to great stress. They will see whether we are basically selfish, or whether we are fairminded. A selfish person is never fairminded, because such a person will always put self-interest ahead of fairness. Do we take advantage of other people and put self first, when we have the opportunity to do so? Or do we in such circumstances try to help other people without taking advantage of them?

These are some of the things that can create “a light” for the world.

But whether or not in that process they also see that we tithe and don't eat pork and keep the weekly Sabbath is very much secondary to what they'll see about us and our character. In most cases **us keeping the Sabbath does not create any light for anyone in the world**; because there isn't very much for them to see at the best of times.

Now you may disagree with this statement about Sabbath-keeping not being a light for the world. So let me elaborate on what I mean.

IS SABBATH-KEEPING A LIGHT FOR THE WORLD?

As far as **Sabbath-keeping** is concerned, the world is simply not paying attention. We don't see the things we are not looking for, and us keeping the Sabbath is simply not something the world is looking for. At best our Sabbath-keeping is barely recognized by the world. It is barely recognized because **people in the world are not looking** for anyone to keep any specific day. They don't know what it means “to keep a day holy”.

Even the people who go to church on Sundays aren't really “keeping Sunday” at all. Apart from going to church, those people treat Sunday like every other day. They may go to church on Sunday morning and in the afternoon they watch their favorite sports teams on TV. Or they'll work in their gardens or do chores around the house. Or they'll do their weekly shopping at Walmart. Simply going to church for an hour or so on Sunday morning doesn't amount to “keeping Sunday”, because for the rest of Sunday they do all the things they also do on the other days of the week. They don't really set Sunday apart from the other days because they don't really know what it means to actually “keep a day”.

For that matter, Muslims may go to prayers for an hour on a Friday, and after that they go back to work for the rest of the day. But they don't set the whole Friday, all 24 hours of it, apart from the other days. I witnessed this many times at the Oriental Plaza Shopping Center in Johannesburg, South Africa, where only on Fridays some of the shops were closed for two hours over lunch, while they were away at prayers at their local Mosque. After that they returned and again opened their shops for business as usual.

My point is: **the whole world** across various religions isn't really familiar with people actually “**keeping a day**”, by setting **that whole 24-hour period** apart from the other days of the week. That idea is totally foreign to the world. And because they are not looking for it, therefore they don't notice that we keep the whole 24 hours of the Sabbath separate from the other days of the week.

Note also that I said “**in most cases**” us keeping the Sabbath does not create any light for the world to see. There certainly can be instances where our keeping of the Sabbath does create a light for certain people in the world. But those rare cases are the exception and not the rule.

One important consideration to keep in mind here is: we should not confuse **facing tests and**

temptations with **letting our lights shine**. Those three things are not the same thing. All three are very important, but they are different from one another.

The distinctions between facing temptations + facing tests + having good works are as follows:

1) The two sources of **temptations** are Satan and our own lusts, desires and wants. Now temptations involve the potential of the breaking of God's laws. Dealing with temptations is about **breaking or not breaking God's laws**. With temptations we ourselves have to decide to resist breaking any of God's laws. Temptations never come from God. God never tempts us to break His laws. Temptations always come from Satan and/or our own lusts and desires. And temptations always involve a certain amount of stress.

2) **Tests** come from God. And tests are not about us potentially breaking God's laws. Rather, tests are about having **faith in God**. Will we trust God or not in any number of different circumstances in our lives? In those situations breaking or keeping God's laws is not really the issue. The issue is faith and trust in God. And this also involves stressful situations for us. Tests are situations when our faith is challenged, rather than our obedience to God's laws being challenged. Many people in the Church of God don't really understand this distinction.

where our faith in God is being tested. And in addition to these things we will also be presented with opportunities to do good, situations where there is no stress on us, and where there is no danger of potentially breaking any of God's laws. Those situations reveal what we will do in everyday situations, when we are not pressured to behave one way or the other.

We have to clearly understand these distinctions between temptations and trials and good works, in order to grasp what Jesus Christ was speaking about when He instructed us to have "good works" in our lives.

The "light" Jesus Christ was speaking about was not a reference to how we deal with tests and temptations! The "light" in Christ's instruction refers to **making the most of our opportunities to do good**. That is why Jesus Christ specifically mentioned "good works" which can be seen by other people.

Dealing with temptations and tests, on the other hand, is primarily not about doing good works. Good works are about what we do when things are going well for us, when we are not facing temptations or tests. Good works reveal the real us! They reveal who we really are!

Let's apply this to the context of Sabbath-keeping:

Facing tests and trials involves resisting the pressure to break the Sabbath, as in: "either you work on Saturday or you are fired". This creates great stress, and God blesses us when we make the right decision to resist compromising our commitment to keeping the Sabbath. But we haven't actually done

something, as far as what we do for the 24 hours that constitute the Sabbath. We have simply refused to work, as we should refuse to work on the Sabbath.

But we haven't produced "**any good works**" for other people to see regarding what we actually do on the Sabbath, how we spend that 24-hour period. It was a trial which we passed when we refused to work. And God will reward us for passing that trial.

Now in the course of our working lives some of us may face that trial two or three times. But nowadays most of the time **that trial is avoided** by during the job interview making clear that we will never work on Saturdays. At that point we either get the job or we don't. Today there are millions of jobs that never require employees to work on Saturdays. And so when we don't work on Saturdays that is in most cases totally unnoticed by other people as something significant.

Letting our lights shine involves **what we do** for those 24 hours of the Sabbath. Those 24 hours provide us with opportunities to produce good works. The good works on the Sabbath would include first and foremost time spent in prayer and in Bible study, giving God more of our time. The good works on the Sabbath also include how we treat people at church services, including helping people who need help. But this category of good works **the world will never see**.

In letting our lights shine for the world, breaking or not breaking any of God's laws is not really the issue. In letting our lights shine we are not under any stress to compromise our commitment to God, as we are when we face trials and temptations. The point is that the instruction to let our lights shine is an instruction for **what we do in our everyday lives**, without any pressure to break any of God's laws.

Consider the context of Jesus Christ's command to let our lights shine. Jesus Christ was speaking to Jews, in a society where everybody was expected to keep the Sabbath. So in that context keeping the Sabbath wasn't doing any "good works". People did not need to be encouraged to keep the Sabbath. And by "good works", that other people could see as a light, Jesus Christ was not referring to Sabbath-keeping, or to the keeping of any other laws of God. In that society everybody was expected to abide by the 10 commandments. So the observance of all of the 10 commandments by someone didn't stand out as a light to other people in that society.

Jesus Christ's command for us to produce good works that other people can then see is not a reference to commandment-keeping. It is a reference to what we actually do with our lives day in and day out. With producing good works, living by all of God's laws is taken for granted.

I have taken some time with this because many church members believe that standing up to an employer and refusing to work on the Sabbath is how we let our lights shine. Now doing so is very noble, and it is something for which God will reward us. But **it is not what Jesus Christ was referring to** when He instructed us to let our lights shine.

Jesus Christ was referring to the things we do in our everyday lives in dealing with other people. It may include obedience to God's commandments, but that is not the focus of this instruction. Obedience to God's commandments is already covered by resisting temptations to break God's laws. Producing

good works, goes one step further than just obeying God's laws.

So let's get back to the subject of letting our lights shine.

If we are selfish, if we lose our temper, if in difficult circumstances we are willing to compromise, if we are proud and conceited ... yes, **those are the things the world will very readily see in us**. But none of those things will create any "light" for them to see.

But if we are the opposite regarding all of the above traits, i.e. we are unselfish and fairminded, we remain calm in stressful situations, we are firm and uncompromising with our commitments, we are friendly and easy-to-get-along-with, etc., those things they will also see. And **those things will present a light to them**.

Let's look at the next verse.

Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bucket, but **on a candlestick**; and it gives light unto all that are in the house. (Matthew 5:15)

A light is not meant to be hidden. If we live **in a cave** all by ourselves, or **in some commune** in some semi-desert area just amongst ourselves, then **we cannot be a light** to the world! If we organize our lives so that we hardly ever need to interact with anyone in the world, then we cannot be a light to the world. To be a light to the world means that we have to live amongst people in the world, without partaking of their way of life. As Jesus Christ prayed to the Father:

I pray not that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil. (John 17:15)

The Apostle Peter put it this way:

Wherein **they think it strange** that you run not with *them* to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of *you* : (1 Peter 4:4)

For people "to think it strange" means that we have some contact with them, that we live amongst them. Peter was talking about Christians letting their light shine in their own communities. People see that we are honest and sincere and fairminded and helpful and kind, and that we reject ungodly customs and traditions (though they obviously don't think of those things as "ungodly"). And many people in the world, once they realize that we don't agree with their selfish activities, will find fault with us, and then they speak evil of us, just like the Apostle Peter said.

So after identifying our specific calling in verses 14-15, Jesus Christ then gave us a clear instruction in verse 16. Let's look at it more closely.

Let your light so shine before men, **that they may see your good works**, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

The Greek expression for “**good works**” (i.e. “ta kala erga”) refers to **actions, conduct** that can be observed, etc. It refers to **what we actually do** in our daily lives, things that other people can observe.

Let’s be quite clear: “**good works**” **do not refer to things we don’t do!** The things we don’t do cannot be observed by anyone. There is nothing to see with the things we don’t do. That’s pretty obvious, isn’t it?

Right, well then let’s look at the 10 commandments. We are absolutely required to observe all of the 10 commandments. But here is the point:

People don’t see us keeping the 10 commandments!

8 of the 10 commandments tell us **not to do something**:

- don’t have other gods before the true God (Exodus 20:3)
- don’t make graven images (verse 4)
- don’t bow down to graven images (verse 5)
- don’t take God’s name in vain (verse 7)
- don’t kill (verse 13)
- don’t commit adultery (verse 14)
- don’t steal (verse 15)
- don’t bear false witness (verse 16)
- don’t covet anything (verse 17).

When we faithfully observe all of these commandments, then **there is nothing for anyone to see**. Not doing all of the above things does not involve any actions on our part. If we break these commandments, yes, **then** there is something to see (e.g. if we kill, steal, or commit adultery, or take God’s name in vain, etc.). But if we keep all of these commands, there are no “good works” for anyone to see.

The only ones of the 10 commandments that actually tell us **to do something** are:

- keep the Sabbath holy (verses 8-11)
- honor our father and mother (verse 12).

Since we are adults, and in most cases we no longer live with our parents, therefore in most cases there is nothing for people to see when we adults “honor our parents”. And we’ve already discussed the Sabbath, which is **a day of not working**, not doing very much that the world could observe.

So here is what we need to understand about Jesus Christ’s instruction to give other people the opportunity “to see our good works”:

Jesus Christ’s command “let your light so shine before men, that they may **see** your good works” is **not a reference to us keeping the 10 commandments**.

The 10 commandments instruct us not to engage in bad conduct. And 8 of the 10 commandments themselves don’t actually command us **to do good works**.

For many people in God’s Church it is not difficult to keep God’s commandments, without anybody around them observing anything that is different from what all other people in the community are also doing. They only notice certain differences **if we tell them**: I keep the Sabbath, I don’t eat pork, etc. And there are occasions when we have to do that. But the people to whom we don’t reveal this type of personal information commonly don’t notice anything different about us, if we are discreetly practicing our religious commitments. That’s because obeying commandments **to not do something** does not leave a trail which other people could notice. So there is nothing for people in our community to see when we keep the 10 commandments.

A CHANGE IN FOCUS

The original focus of the 10 commandments was on telling us **not to do** certain things. That focus was changed by Jesus Christ. Instead of focusing on what we are not to do, Jesus Christ presented the same instructions with a positive focus. Jesus Christ spelled out **what we are commanded to do**.

Jesus Christ was asked:

Master, **which is the great commandment in the law?** (Matthew 22:36)

We all know Jesus Christ’s answer to this question.

Jesus said unto him, **you shall love** the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. **This is the first and great commandment.** (Matthew 22:37-38)

And the second *is* like unto it, **you shall love** your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew 22:39)

These are positive instructions to **actively do something**. These are not don't do something instructions. We are to actively love God! And we are to actively love our neighbor.

Let's focus on the 1st of these two commandments. How do we "love God"?

We do that primarily **by the things we do in our lives**, with a focus on **the motivations** for why we do those things. Loving God requires us **to do things** that demonstrate the love we profess.

In the past we ministers, including me, have often said the following, because somebody before us had said it, and it had sounded right to us:

The **1st 4** commandments tell us **how** to love God, and the **last 6** commandments tell us **how** to love fellow man.

But this isn't really correct!

The 1st 3 commandments tell us what **not** to do. And **we don't really love God by not doing anything**. We haven't done anything, and we haven't shown God anything about our own individual personality and character when we don't do anything.

Furthermore, breaking the last 6 commandments can also be an expression of not loving God. Consider when King David committed adultery and then had Uriah murdered. What did David say when he repented?

Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done **this evil** in Your sight: that You might be justified when You speak, *and* be clear when You judge. (Psalm 51:4)

So breaking the 6th and 7th commandments was also an expression of not really loving God. If we break **any** of the 10 commandments, it shows that we don't really love God! So don't try to restrict "loving God" to the 1st 4 commandments, because that is simply not correct.

Okay, now let's look at the last 6 commandments. Apart from honoring our parents all those commandments likewise tell us **not** to do certain things. And **we cannot possibly love our neighbor if we don't do anything that affects our neighbor**.

Love is not passive! **Love is active**. One way that Jesus Christ defined love is recorded in Matthew 5:43-44. As I have mentioned many times in the past, one way to define "love" is as follows. To love

someone means that we: 1) say good to them and about them, 2) do good to them and for them, and 3) pray for them. That's what Jesus Christ spelled out in these two verses.

But people can actually keep the last 6 commandments without saying good about people, without doing good to people, and without praying for people. These things (say good, do good, pray for) are not actually a part of the 10 commandments. They are actions that go **above and beyond** the instructions in the last 6 commandments.

So again, **it is not really correct** to say that the last 6 commandments tell us how to love fellow man. They only tell us what we are not to do. But not doing anything is not the same as expressing love. Love **requires** us to do something positive.

Not doing any of the things forbidden in the last 5 commandments is absolutely required of us. But not doing any of those things doesn't really create much light for the world to see. Millions of people in the world also don't kill anyone, millions of people in the world also don't commit adultery or lie or steal, and millions of people also don't covet the things that belong to someone else. And those millions of people aren't producing any light by not doing those things.

To really produce some "light" for other people to see, requires that we do things they can recognize as good and desirable, things which go above and beyond just keeping the 10 commandments.

Now throughout the Bible God repeatedly expands on original instructions for us human beings. And that is also the case here. Whereas in the Old Testament God's law focused on **not doing** things that are wrong and bad, not getting involved in any wrong actions or conduct, Jesus Christ in the New Testament expanded those original instructions to focus on actively doing things in our lives. **Doing good things** is a way of putting love into practice.

ENTRY-LEVEL CHRISTIANITY

The fact is: many people in the churches of God focus on not breaking God's laws. And thus the acceptance of the incorrect claim that the 10 commandments tell us **how** to love God and also fellow-man has created a problem. That line of thinking is basically a focus on us keeping our noses clean. Such a focus is nothing more than **entry-level Christianity!**

Nothing wrong with that focus. But it is short-sighted. And it doesn't really produce many fruits in our lives. It doesn't produce any growth. Put another way, keeping our noses clean by keeping all of God's commandments is "**one-talent Christianity**" (see Matthew 25:14-30). And the parable shows that the one-talent-servant was indeed "a servant of God", but he was "unprofitable" (verse 30). The one-talent servant refers to **Christians in God's Church**, people who made a commitment to God, and who then received "one talent" from God.

To produce fruits requires us to work! **Without work no fruits can be produced.** Servants who only obey the 10 commandments, without any active, positive conduct are in danger of being entry-level one-talent Christians. One-talent Christians do not give off any light for the world to see. **The one-talent**

Christian didn't do any work at all, he **just kept the 10 commandments**.

And you don't want to be an entry-level one-talent Christian! So you have to do more than only keeping the 10 commandments!

Put another way:

Church members who only keep all of God's laws and who resist the temptations that come their way, but who make no effort to produce good works are practicing **a passive Christianity**. It is passive because they are not actually doing anything beyond what they are commanded to do. The servant who received one talent in the parable was a passive Christian. **He had zero good works** in his life. All he had done was keep God's laws, the entry-level into God's Church, which laws all of us are commanded to keep.

It is the activity of producing good works that then elevates this to **an active Christianity**. In active Christianity God's servants are also keeping all of God's laws. But in addition, they are also on the lookout for opportunities to do good. These servants of their own initiative do more than the law requires them to do. And they look for such opportunities to do more. They are not passive in their practice of Christianity.

Passive Christians are not going to be in God's kingdom. That is what two different parables show us: the parable of the talents (Matthew 25) and the parable of the pounds (Luke 19). In both these parables the man who did not produce anything was **the passive Christian**. And the Christians in these parables who increased the pound or the talents they were given did so by producing good works. They were the active Christians.

Now by addressing this subject in two different parables Jesus Christ is showing us that **not producing any good works is a significant problem amongst members of God's Church**. And an important contributing factor towards creating this problem within God's Church is **falsely** equating commandment-keeping with having good works in our lives. These two things (commandment-keeping and producing good works) are not at all the same. But it is this false perception that encourages some people to bury the pound (or talent) they have received, i.e. to believe that just keeping God's laws will produce good works in their lives. And so they settle into a passive Christianity. They don't produce any light for other people to see. That is an extremely dangerous condition.

To get back to the matter of good works:

Consider that there are millions of people in this world's false churches who really try to keep the 10 commandments. To do that doesn't require special revelation from God, or special understanding from God. I'm not saying that they keep the 10 commandments perfectly, or that they even try to keep the Sabbath. But then, you and I don't keep God's laws perfectly either, do we? We too fall short at various times. But those millions of people in the world don't produce any real fruits in their lives, from God's perspective. They just live their lives and they also try to keep their noses clean, based on their own understanding.

But if they don't have "good works" from God's point of view, then they also don't have any real light for others to see.

So keeping the 10 commandments is very good. But that is not really the same as producing good fruits in our lives; it is not the same as letting our lights shine.

Yes, certainly, we are absolutely required to keep all of God's commandments. It is being willing and committed to keeping all of God's commandments that makes us eligible for "**one talent**". But let's also understand that when we then do receive that one talent, that is going to put **great pressure on us**. God absolutely demands that we put that one talent to use, and that we then produce some light for people in the world to see. And that means **that we must do a whole lot more** than just keep the 10 commandments.

GIVING OFF LIGHT FOR THE WORLD TO SEE

People in the world don't see that we don't kill other people. But they do see whether or not we always control our temper. They do see whether or not we "lose it" when we are put under great stress. They do see when stress makes us hysterical.

People in the world don't see anything when we don't covet things that belong to other people. But they do see whether we are greedy and selfish, or whether we are fairminded in dealing with them specifically.

People in the world don't see that we don't commit adultery. But they do see how we treat other people. And they do see if we readily help other people who need help.

There is nothing for people in the world to see when we don't take God's name in vain. But they do see if we are self-indulgent. And they do see if we always put our own selfish needs and wants first. And they do see if we don't really care if our actions may cause other people to suffer.

People in the world don't see anything if we have no other gods. But they do see through hypocrisy very easily. And they do see when we behave self-righteously.

People in the world don't see that we don't eat pork or other unclean foods. But they do see whether or not we keep our promises. And they do see how we deal with adversity. They also readily see if we are always critical of other people, if we easily speak in disparaging ways about other people.

People in the world don't see anything when we don't steal. But they do see how we treat people who are suffering in one way or another. They do see whether we have a spirit of mercy and compassion for other people, or whether we treat people harshly. And they do see whether we are willing to forgive other people, or whether we hold a grudge.

You get the idea?

It is **how we conduct our lives within the 10 commandments** that determines whether we are letting our light shine or not. It is the **things we say**, and the **things we do**, and the **attitudes** and the **demeanor** we display, above and beyond keeping the 10 commandments, that will determine whether or not we will rise above the “entry-level” of Christianity. And rise above that level we must.

We should also recognize that many people who are in the Church with us are quite content to stay on that “entry-level”. Like the one-talent servant, they have **no motivation** to rise above that basic level. They believe that obedience to all of God’s laws is all that is required of them, and that their obedience to God’s laws will somehow produce good deeds for the world to see. Hopefully this description does not apply to you.

Over the millennia many people have done some of “the right things” with a wrong motivation. And when anyone does the right things for the wrong reason, then those “right things” have no value. In those cases they didn’t do the right things “to please God”; they had some other selfish motivation. But **a desire to please God** didn’t enter their mind.

Consider the parable about the Pharisee and the publican, as recorded in Luke 18:9-14. Assuming that the Pharisee’s claims were correct, the Pharisee was not an extortioner or adulterer, he was not unjust, he tithed faithfully and fasted frequently. All of those attributes are good and desirable, and we need to live our lives so that those things are also true for us. None of these things were a problem for the Pharisee.

The Pharisee’s problem was **his motivation** for doing what is good, and **his attitude towards other people**. A wrong attitude very easily destroys the value of any good deeds. A wrong attitude reveals what we are really like in the sight of God. And that was the case with the Pharisee. His words revealed his wrong attitude.

This can also very easily affect all of us in God’s Church today.

We can be keeping God’s laws and commandments. And that is good. But if we have a wrong attitude towards other people, then that wrong attitude destroys the value of our obedience to God’s laws. If we despise people and have contempt for people, then that will defile our obedience to God.

It is extremely important that we do our “good works” with the correct motivation, and with the right attitude towards God and towards fellow man. It is not enough to just focus on keeping the commandments.

Now the New Testament is full of instructions for us to produce “good works” in our lives. And those instructions do not refer to simply keeping the 10 commandments. They all refer to doing more, producing **positive actions** that can be seen by people in the world.

INSTRUCTIONS TO PRODUCE GOOD WORKS

Let's look at a few of the instructions regarding good works. Let's start with a basic Scripture.

For we are His workmanship, **created** in Christ Jesus **unto good works**, which God has before ordained **that we should walk in them**. (Ephesians 2:10)

God created us for the very purpose of producing good works in our lives. Here "good works" is not a reference to keeping the 10 commandments. It is a reference to us doing things in our lives, and conducting ourselves in ways that people will recognize as good and desirable. It is not a focus on not doing evil, but a focus on actively doing things that are good. This is **doing much more** than just obeying God's laws.

In reference to a specific category of service, which applied to older widows within the Church, Paul wrote:

Well reported of for good works; if she have **brought up children**, if she have **lodged strangers**, if she have **washed the saints' feet**, if she have **relieved the afflicted**, if she have diligently followed every good work. (1 Ti 5:10)

This gives us a random list of some examples that constitute good works. These things don't focus on keeping God's laws. They focus on **actions that are good**. Let's look at this random list.

"**Brought up children**" refers to good child rearing. Good child rearing is one specific area of good works. Child rearing is an opportunity to produce good works for all of us who are parents. And the results of our child rearing can be seen by people around us, when they can observe our children. Solomon tells us:

Train up a child **in the way he should go**: and when he is old, **he will not depart from it**. (Proverbs 22:6)

Teaching children correctly prepares them for the duties and responsibilities of adulthood. How we rear our children can have a major influence on whether or not they will one day become a part of the Family of God.

"**Lodged strangers**" is another area of good works. Hospitality is an attribute that is not addressed in the 10 commandments, but it is an important area for producing good works. Again, this requires us to do more than just keep God's laws. Hospitality is definitely an area that allows our lights to shine.

"**Washed the saints' feet**" refers to a willingness to serve other people. "Washing people's feet" was a recognized act of service in Jewish society 2000 years ago. It is not a custom in our world today. In our modern societies this instruction would apply to helping fellow church members in various different ways,

without involving any washing of feet. It is **the principle** of readily helping other people, that is involved in this opportunity to let our light shine.

“Relieving the afflicted” refers to helping people who are in some way suffering. Think of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37), who helped a stranger who had been beaten up pretty badly. Once again this has nothing to do with the 10 commandments as they are spelled out in the Old Testament. But **it has everything to do with** Jesus Christ’s changed focus on “love God above all else, and **love your neighbor as yourself**”.

So here is the point:

The 10 commandments originally had a focus on what we are not to do. But the commandments did not in any way focus on the attitude of **mercy** and **compassion**. Such an attitude is **on a higher level** than the letter of the law. People can keep the letter of the law regarding the 10 commandments, and yet have no compassion for other people, and be unwilling to extend mercy to others.

While not expressed in the 10 commandments, it is clear that even in Old Testament times God really desired to see people look for the actual intent underlying all of God’s laws. Whether or not people would figure that out for themselves was one more way of exposing the workings of the human mind. The Prophet Micah spelled this out for us.

He has showed you, O man, what *is* good; and what does the LORD require of you, but **to do justly**, and **to love mercy**, and **to walk humbly** with your God? (Micah 6:8)

Micah shows that God isn’t really focused on getting us to not do certain things, on avoiding transgressing His laws. Keeping God’s laws is important, yes, but it is not God’s real focus.

God is focused on what we do!

That is a positive focus. It is not a focus on “where are you breaking My laws?”. **“To do justly”** means we are fairminded, that we practice positive Christianity in the things we do ... rather than focusing on not doing certain things. **“To love mercy”** is a frame of mind that has nothing to do with not breaking God’s laws. But that frame of mind is precisely what God is looking for. Are we really willing to forgive others who have wronged us? Do we really have mercy on people who are suffering, by us trying to help them? Or do we only have a “be warmed and filled” attitude” (see James 2:16) for people in distress?

“To walk humbly” is an attitude that must be the foundation on which obedience is established. The publican had sinned, but he walked humbly before God. The Pharisee claimed to have obeyed all of God’s laws, but he had a total lack of humility. **Keeping God’s laws without humility is of no value.**

These three attributes in Micah 6:8 don’t directly appeal to any of God’s laws. But they will expose how a man’s mind functions. They reveal how a man thinks and reasons.

These three attributes reveal whether or not God will be able to work with a person's mind. **Without these three attributes God cannot really work with a man or a woman.** When these attributes are present, then any other problems can be ironed out fairly easily. But in the absence of these attributes other problems will be major obstacles to establishing a relationship with God.

Let's look at another Scripture. Here are some guidelines for young men.

Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded. In all things showing yourself **a pattern of good works:** in doctrine *showing* uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, **sound speech**, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you. (Titus 2:6-8)

Paul is showing us that true Christianity reveals itself to other people through "a pattern of good works". In other words, in our lives our primary focus is on **opportunities to do good**, based on the premise that we **obviously** strive to live by all of God's laws. And those good works will also manifest themselves in our "sound speech".

I believe that in the past half century we have **focused too much** on keeping God's laws, and **not enough** on good attitudes as a foundation for good works.

Keeping all of God's laws does not involve any kind of building! When we keep God's laws we haven't yet built anything. **Keeping all of God's laws is a foundation!** It is a foundation on which we can then build something. Now the foundation is always more important than whatever is then built on it. If the foundation is bad, then whatever is built on it is going to be worthless, because the bad foundation will cause whatever we have built on it to come to ruin.

We all know the parable about building a house either on a foundation of rock, or on a foundation of sand (see Matthew 7:24-27). With any building **the foundation is always the most important thing.** But the focus of the builder is not on the foundation. The builder's focus is on the structure he plans to build on that foundation. And then people will not see the foundation; **people will only see the impressive building** that has been built on that solid foundation. And they will marvel at the building, and not at the foundation. A solid foundation is usually just taken for granted.

So keeping all of God's laws is the most important thing, because that forms a solid foundation. But that foundation is mostly invisible to the world. For the world to see anything, we have to build something on that foundation. And what Jesus Christ instructs us to do, is to build "good works" on that foundation. Those good works will be seen by the world, while the foundation will remain mostly hidden from their view. Every foundation only becomes valuable when something of value is built on that foundation. A foundation on its own, without a building on it, is not very desirable. A foundation is only a means to producing something of value.

Throughout Mr. Armstrong's ministry the Church focused primarily on building the foundation for a Christian life, with very little focus on building something on that solid foundation.

And that was fine!

When God called Mr. Armstrong, the Church of God was in the process of dying out. Worldwide there were only tiny remnants of true Christians. A false Christianity was the dominant force in religion. Religious people in the world had no idea what it means to be a true Christian. So Mr. Armstrong's ministry was focused on **explaining the basics for entry-level Christianity**.

Those basics include that God requires us to live by all of His laws and commandments. And that includes God's laws regarding the weekly Sabbath, the annual Feasts and Holy days, tithing, and dietary laws. These things were foreign to the so-called "Christianity" of this world. It took a long time to expose the world to these concepts, so that a few people here and there might begin to understand what a Christian life is all about.

With the world at large being critical of the true foundation for Christianity (i.e. critical of obedience to all of God's laws), it called for an uncompromising focus on the elements for a solid foundation on Mr. Armstrong's part. And that was Mr. Armstrong's contribution to helping God's Church to begin to grow again, instead of dying out. He focused on that foundation.

We are now living in the year 2025, and next month it will be 40 years since Mr. Armstrong died. And now there are **a considerable number of people** around the world who are **quite familiar with** all the elements of **the foundation** for a Christian life. In the early 1980s there were 100,000 people keeping the Feast of Tabernacles. These people (i.e. us, you and I) freely accept that God requires us to live by all of His laws.

Now we should be ready for **a change in focus**! Now we need to focus on building something on that solid foundation. This change in focus does not in any way diminish the importance of the foundation. Rather, this change in focus **puts that foundation to use**, to build something, which the world will see as "a light".

Our lights will only shine when we begin to build on that foundation. We need to focus on advancing beyond that entry-level. We need to focus on actively doing good, so that people will "glorify" God the Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16 again).

Consider this:

Doing the things we are commanded to do never reveals a person's true character. That is because **we have no choice** if we want to be accepted. If we don't do the things we are commanded to do, then we are also not accepted. So if we want to be accepted, then we do not have a choice regarding doing the things we are commanded to do. And our true character is not revealed when we then observe all of God's laws.

True character is revealed by the things we do which are not commanded.

Once we have accepted the foundation, then we will be accepted within the Church whether we have good deeds, or whether we have none. So **we truly have a choice** when opportunities for good works present themselves. We are accepted within the church community whether we show mercy in a certain situation, or whether we don't show mercy. We are accepted in the Church whether we help people in need, or whether we don't help such people. We don't have to fear being put out of the Church if we don't volunteer to help someone. One-talent Christians are always fully accepted by other church members. So once we are in God's Church we have a choice.

For those people who desire to be in the Church of God, there is no choice when it comes to meeting the entry-level requirements. But **after having met those requirements there is always a choice** regarding whether or not to perform good works. And it is these particular circumstances that will reveal our true character to God. It is these circumstances that create the potential for creating a light for the world to see.

Jesus Christ's parable about the servant who had worked all day in the fields still having to do more work is pretty clear. The conclusion is unambiguous.

Does He thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? **I don't think so.** So likewise you, **when you shall have done all those things which are commanded you**, say, **We are unprofitable servants**: we have done (only) that which was our duty to do. (Luke 17:9-10)

This is clear, isn't it? The "things that are commanded us" are the 10 commandments plus all of God's other laws. So if all we do is keep God's Sabbath and the annual Feasts and Holy Days, and tithe, and don't eat any unclean foods, then we are **still unprofitable servants for God**.

Let's speak plainly!

Doing only these things describes very many people in the churches of God today! But this is a description of "**unprofitable servants**".

It describes very many people in the various churches of God because they have come to believe that obedience to all of God's laws is all that God requires of them. And they have a hard time recognizing opportunities to do more than just keep God's laws.

But Jesus Christ's statement tells us that **keeping all of God's laws is not enough**, because obedience to all of God's laws represents a "one-talent Christian", someone who is still on the entry-level of Christianity. Just keeping all of God's laws does not produce any growth. But God is looking for growth in us. God expects growth.

Herein is My Father glorified, that you **bear much fruit**; so shall you be My disciples. (John 15:8)

If we don't "bear much fruit", then we are not Jesus Christ's disciples, meaning that then **we are not**

true Christians. That's what Jesus Christ is saying. It is the fruits we bear in our lives that determine whether we are true Christians or not. Keeping all of God's laws must be the foundation, but by itself the foundation is not enough. If we do not build on that foundation, then we are unprofitable servants.

Understand that when Jesus Christ refers to someone as a "servant" then He is not referring to anyone in the world. The designation "servant" is reserved for the people who are a part of God's Church. The one-talent servant was indeed "a servant of God", but he was unprofitable. So the reference to "unprofitable servants" is a reference to **unprofitable members of God's Church**. The word "servant" does not apply to people in the world.

Let's consider a few more Scriptures that tell us that we must have good works. Understand that when Paul refers to "good works", then he is not referring to keeping God's laws.

And God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you; **that you**, always having all sufficiency in all *things*, **may abound to every good work**: (2 Corinthians 9:8)

Paul assumes that God's people will take every opportunity to have good works in their lives, things to build on their obedience to God's laws.

That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, **being fruitful in every good work**, and increasing in the knowledge of God; (Colossians 1:10)

Producing good works is what enables us to rise above the entry-level of Christianity. Good works are vitally important for our spiritual development.

And let us consider one another **to provoke unto love and to good works**: (Hebrews 10:24)

It is the good works that are really important. Let's encourage one another to do more, to accept opportunities to help someone, and to serve others.

Having **your conduct** honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may **by your good works**, which they shall behold, **glorify God in the day of visitation**. (1 Peter 2:12)

Okay, so our good works may not receive any acceptance from people in the world right now. But **at Christ's 2nd coming** ("the day of visitation") they will recall the examples we set them, and glorify God. For those who will live over into the millennium, the good examples we set today may then speed up their true repentance? At any rate, the Apostle Peter is clearly expecting our lives to be focused on producing good works. And Peter is also not speaking about commandment-keeping. And James tells us the following:

Who *is* a wise man and endowed with knowledge among you? **let him show** out of a good conduct **his works** with meekness of wisdom. (James 3:13)

It is essential that our lives produce works that are good from God's perspective.

Here are Paul's instructions to a fellow-minister.

In all things **showing yourself a pattern of good works**: in doctrine *showing* incorruption, gravity, sincerity, (Titus 2:7)

Good works are what other people will be able to observe. And the good works will reveal the inner man. Notice that good works are to be "a pattern". Good works are not supposed to be "a one-off" event. They are to reflect **a habit of doing good**, a habit of doing more than the law requires.

Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father ... comfort your hearts, and **establish you in every good word and work**. (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17)

We must have good works in our lives. That point is made over and over in the New Testament. And it is always a reference to freely doing things that are strictly speaking not commanded by the law of God. But they are nonetheless expected by God from true Christians.

It is good works that will let our light shine. Paul also made this point to Titus. Let's notice:

This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that you affirm constantly, that they who have believed in God might **be careful to maintain good works**. These things are good and profitable unto men. (Titus 3:8)

And **let ours also learn to maintain good works** for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful. (Titus 3:14)

This is a sample of the Scriptures that show the importance of good works in our lives. It is important that we "maintain" good works; in other words, **we need to make a habit of having good works** in our lives.

So what do "good works" look like?

SOME RANDOM "GOOD WORKS" SITUATIONS

We have established that, on the foundation of living by all of God's laws and commandments, God requires us to have good works in our lives. It is not enough for us to focus on keeping the Sabbath and

Holy Days, tithing and not eating unclean foods. Those things are only the entry-level requirements for becoming a true Christian.

The good works **which other people can see** refer to the way we behave and conduct ourselves in every type of situation that may confront us. Without being exhaustive, that includes the following:

- 1) How we conduct ourselves **in our own family**, with our husband or wife or children or parents.
- 2) How we conduct ourselves in **our extended family**, what we say and do when we are with relatives who don't live with us in our homes.
- 3) How we interact with **our neighbors** and **our community**, people who are not a part of God's Church.
- 4) How we interact with **fellow Church of God members**, at church services and in social occasions.
- 5) How we conduct ourselves at **our places of employment**, with coworkers and customers and management, etc.
- 6) How we deal with people **in shops and places of commerce**, with sales people and fellow customers.
- 7) How we deal with people **when we travel** on planes, trains, buses, in hotels, etc.
- 8) How we deal with people **when we have a complaint** of some kind.
- 9) How we deal with **people in positions of authority** over us, government officials, police officers, customs people, etc.
- 10) How we deal with those **people whom we don't really like**, including personal enemies.
- 11) How we deal with **people with whom we compete**, in sport or in business.
- 12) How we respond in situations **when we win** and **when we lose**.
- 13) How we respond when **people make fun of us**, to embarrass us.

14) How we deal **with false accusations**, and with **insults**, and with **provocations**.

15) How we deal **with praise and flattery**.

16) How we speak about **our own accomplishments** and achievements.

17) How we deal **with employees, contractors**, people who work for us.

18) How we deal with people who **ask us to help them** with something.

19) How we respond to unexpected **health problems**.

20) How we respond when **things continually go wrong** for us, dealing with frustration.

That should suffice to get the idea. In other words, **in every situation in life**, where we are in the presence of other people, we have the opportunity to let our light shine. These situations have nothing to do with keeping the Sabbath or tithing or other laws of God. All these situations represent our regular, every-day living, in both expected and unexpected circumstances.

In all these situations **what we say**, and how we say it, and **what we do** and how we do it present **opportunities to express our real character**, what we are really like as individuals. The feelings, moods and emotions which motivate us in all those situations are also extremely significant in revealing our character.

Now in many of the above situations we can be caught off guard, not really keeping in mind that God sees us and everything we do. And it is in those every-day circumstances, **when we just react spontaneously**, that our true character is revealed to God. Those circumstances reveal what really goes on in our minds. It is in those circumstances that "the tree is identified by its fruit".

Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for **the tree is known by its fruit**. (Matthew 12:33)

It is those every-day events that let our light shine. They expose our true character.

O generation of vipers, **how can you**, being evil, **speak good things?** for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. (Matthew 12:34)

It is in common every-day situations that the mouth speaks "out of the abundance of the heart". What is going on in the mind of a person will show itself in the speech and the conduct of that person. Our words

reveal our true motivations for the things we do.

A good man out of **the good treasure** of the heart brings forth good things: and **an evil man** out of **the evil treasure** brings forth evil things. (Matthew 12:35)

Now here is the point:

It is “the treasure in our minds” that determines whether we are “good” or whether we are “evil”.

The “treasure in our minds” has to be there first, before it can be established whether we are good or evil. The treasure in our minds is **the foundation of our character**. A good treasure cannot produce an evil man, and an evil treasure cannot produce a good man. Whether we are good or evil is an outward manifestation of the treasure in our minds.

The treasure in our minds refers to **the way our minds work**, the **motivation** and the **intentions** we have for everything we say and do. A wrong motivation destroys the value of a right outward action. And conversely, when the motivation and the intention are right, but through ignorance or foolishness the outward action is wrong, then that decreases the moral seriousness of that wrong outward action. The wrong outward action was performed in ignorance or on impulse.

Here I am thinking of the Apostle Paul, who called the High Priest “a whitened wall”, when Paul didn’t know that the man was the High Priest. See Acts 23:2-5 for the details. Paul’s lack of respect for the office of the High Priest was based on ignorance, on not knowing that the man was the High Priest.

Now all of the 20 different situations I listed above represent circumstances which will expose the treasure in our minds. The treasure in our minds will reveal itself in what we say and what we do in all those situations. It is **the way we use our minds** that will determine whether in these situations our light will shine, or whether there will not be any light coming from us.

That’s where our free will enters the picture. We are not preprogrammed to respond a certain way. We ourselves decide to speak and behave in a positive or a negative way. We ourselves decide whether that treasure in our minds is good or evil. We have that power of choice.

Now let’s keep in mind that all of us human beings start out with a Genesis 6:5 mind; all of us start out with a mind in which “every imagination of the thoughts of our hearts is only evil continually”. **It is an evil treasure with which we all start out.** Nobody has an advantage at the starting blocks of life; nobody is born with a repentant mind.

By repenting and coming into God’s Church, we have said in good faith that we want to get rid of that evil treasure in our minds, and that we want to replace it with a good treasure. And to help us in that process, God has given us “one talent”. And now it is up to us to use that one talent to first throw out the evil treasure (i.e. the wrong ways of using our minds), and then to slowly but surely acquire a good

treasure (i.e. establish the godly way of using our minds).

The way we then acquire and accumulate a good treasure is by the way we use our minds in all of these every-day circumstances. It is in the process of building up a good treasure in our minds that we will be letting our light shine.

IN SUMMARY:

1) God absolutely requires all of us who strive to be true Christians to **obey the 10 commandments** and all of His laws. Without obedience to God's laws it is impossible to be a true Christian.

2) But this obedience only represents the **entry-level into Christianity**. This obedience and repentance mean that God will give us one talent.

3) Once we have received that one talent from God, we are required to use that one talent to produce **good works** in our lives.

4) The 10 commandments mostly tell us what we are not to do. So we can keep the 10 commandments by not doing anything (apart from keeping the Sabbath). The instruction to have good works is **not an instruction to keep the 10 commandments** ... at this stage obedience to all of God's laws is already taken for granted.

5) Good works refer to **the things we say and do that don't actually affect obedience to the 10 commandments**. Good works refer to the way we deal with people in every situation with which life may confront us. What we say and what we do in all our daily activities provides us with opportunities to have good works.

6) The **misguided** understanding, that all God expects from us is obedience to all of God's laws, has led many people in God's Church to focus on nothing more than keeping the Sabbath and the Feasts and annual Holy Days, to tithe, and not to eat any unclean foods. To put these laws into practice in our lives does not require us to have access to God's spirit. They can all be kept without access to "a talent from God".

In fact, these things are the things which the "one-talent-servant" also did without making use of the one talent he had received. He kept all of these laws. But **he never made use of the one talent** he had been given. He never produced any good works.

And over the past half century or so, too many people in the Church of God have been complacent about doing anything more than keeping these particular laws. That amounts to making no effort whatsoever to let our light shine. These people stayed at the entry-level of Christianity. And that is not good.

7) In this context it is helpful if we have a clear understanding of the differences between dealing with temptations, and dealing with trials, and having good works in our lives. They are not all the same thing.

8) In the New Testament we are instructed many times to have good works in our lives. Good works must always be built on the foundation of obedience to God's laws. But good works focus on how we interact with other people in hundreds of different daily circumstances, what we say and what we do, the motivation and the attitude we have in those situations.

9) It is **qualities that are not really addressed directly in God's laws** that are necessary for producing good works. This includes things like an attitude of mercy and compassion and kindness towards other people, a lack of feeling sorry for ourselves, humility, faithfulness, keeping our word, readily extending forgiveness to other people, a willingness to help other people, a willingness to serve others, keeping anger and other negative emotions under control, etc. These and others like them are the attributes that are needed to produce good works in our own lives.

10) It is when we are producing good works by using these attributes as tools, that then we will be letting our light shine.

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