

Once Upon a Time in the Government **By Paul R. Blake**

(I read an amusing story about government mismanagement years ago. It illustrates the point that it is easy for one to forget his true purpose by getting caught up in "busy work.") "Once upon a time, the government had a large military scrap yard in the middle of a desert. Congress said it is possible that someone would steal from it at night, so they created a night watchman position and hired a person for the job.

Then Congress said, "How can the watchman do his job without instruction?" So they created a planning position and hired two people: one person to write the instructions and another person to do time studies.

Then Congress said, "How will we know the night watchman is doing the task correctly?" So they created a Quality Control position and hired two people, one to observe the watchman and another to write the reports.

Then Congress said, "How are these people going to get paid?" So they created more positions -- a time keeper and a payroll officer -- and hired two more people.

Then Congress said, "Who will be responsible for all of these people?" So they created an administrative position and hired three people: an Administration Officer, an Assistant Administration Officer and a Legal Secretary.

Then Congress said, "We have had this command in operation for one year and we are \$40,000 over budget so we must cut back our costs." So they laid off the night watchman."

We laugh at politicians for doing such things, but religious organizations do the same things. They hire people to do the personal work, to teach and entertain the young people; they institutionalize every aspect of the work of the church until they just maintain the institution and forget about the work it is supposed to do.

Here in sound churches of Christ, we scoff at the institutional Christians for doing such things, but perhaps we would do well to take a look at ourselves to see if we are guilty of doing the same thing spiritually.

At the very core of our Christianity is our service to God and man. We want to improve that relationship, and so we look around for things that will help. We attend Bible classes, Gospel meetings, and lectureships. We know the answers to all of the issues, both doctrinal and conscience based. We get excited about reading the latest article on some aspect of sound faith Vs. doctrinal error. We listen to CDs and read books. And if we're not careful, our Christianity can become entirely focused on those things. Ironically, the things that get neglected in the process will be the souls of our children, the souls of our neighbors, yes even our own souls.

Those efforts serve a wonderful purpose. But we need to be careful not to forget why we started doing those things in the first place. (Matt. 23:23-24; Phil. 3:8-9)

A Most Challenging Command **By Ethan R. Longhenry**

"To him therefore that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). How do we define a "good, moral person"? Much of the time, a "good, moral person" is defined more by what they are not doing than what they are doing. "Good, moral people" do not get drunk, do not kill other people, do not steal (at least that much), do not lie, and avoid many other sins. They are "good neighbors" because they mostly keep to themselves and do not bother "us."

In the New Testament, priests and Levites would, by common confession, be considered "good, moral people." In fact, in the eyes of many, they were quite holy: they worked for God,

perhaps even in the Temple. They worked quite diligently to avoid contracting any form of uncleanness.

Yet, when Jesus tells us the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), the priest and the Levite in the story do not turn out to be that “good.” They are the ones who saw the man beaten up by robbers but did nothing to help him. In so doing, they failed to prove to be “neighbors” to that man, and thus violated the command to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:10; Luke 10:27).

But the priest and the Levite were “good, moral people!” They would surely have been morally outraged had they seen the robbers beating up the man. They might even have complained about how terrible times were— you cannot even go from Jerusalem to Jericho in peace! Nevertheless, as unpalatable as it may be, the priest and Levite are just as condemned as those robbers who beat up the man in the first place. Sure, the priest and the Levite did not actively hurt the man— yet, when presented with the opportunity to do good to him, they failed to do so. Instead, the “dirty half-breed” Samaritan proved to be more righteous than they!

The New Testament makes it clear that for those who wish to serve Jesus Christ, it is not sufficient to just avoid evil: we must also do what is right. It is not enough to “abhor evil”; we must also “cling to what is good” (Rom. 12:9). We are incomplete if we only avoid the works of the flesh; we must also develop and manifest the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:17-24). James 4:17 goes so far as to declare it sin to fail to do what is good. Since the New Testament never provides any indication that there is a hierarchy of sin, failure to do what is good is just as bad as actively doing what is wrong!

What, then, are these “good things” that we should be doing? We need to be praying for all men (1Tim. 2:1-4). We need to show love, mercy, and compassion to all people, even those who hate us and who stand against us (Luke 6:27-36; 1John 4:7-21). As we have been forgiven, we must forgive others (Eph. 4:32). As we have opportunity, we ought to do good for all people, especially those in the household of faith: we may do so through financial benevolence, giving of our time, and/or using our talents for their benefit (Gal. 6:10; James 1:27). In all things we must imitate our Master, and be willing to serve and be a blessing for others, even without reward (1Cor. 11:1; 1John 2:6).

This is a most challenging command for even “mature” believers. It would be much easier if all we had to do was avoid committing acts of sin! Nevertheless, we have all been called to die to self and live for Christ (Gal. 2:20): that requires us to take on the mind of Christ and to serve others as much as it requires us to renounce self and the desires of sin. Let us not prove disobedient to this charge, but instead to do good whenever we have opportunity!

A Moments Wisdom

- Too many Christians have approached their lives as though they were stepping onto the beaches of Normandy on D-Day with a lawn chair and a book to read.
- If we practice an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, soon the whole world will be blind and toothless.
- We must learn that when we have an argument with our spouse, the first one who says, “I’m sorry I hurt your feelings; please forgive me,” is the winner.