

Am I Doing My Best?

By Paul R. Blake

In any given congregation, one can find Christians in multiple stages of development. There are those who work to care for others. They share their time and resources putting their hearts and hands to the matter of helping newborn Christians grow or lifting up the fallen, weak, sick, or grieving. There are those who need help temporarily. The circumstances of life have exceeded their ability to care for themselves. Under ordinary conditions, they would be helping others, but trials have overtaken them. After the hard times ease, they get back on their feet and march onward. Then there are those who think they are entitled to others' care. They may have started out as those who help others or as those who needed help temporarily, but over time have allowed their character to warp. They gave themselves permission to become lazy, dependent, even addicted to help from others to the extent that they no longer make the effort to lift themselves out of indolence and start helping themselves. Over time, over-burdened brethren become weary of helping these high maintenance Christians, who in turn become resentful and vocal about not receiving the help they believe themselves to be entitled.

Who is doing his best? Well, most would agree that the first group is doing its best. They are not simply taking care of themselves, but they are working, often sacrificially, on behalf of others. It is the spirit the apostle Paul spoke of in Galatians 6:2, 4-5 -- *"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ... But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load."* They are carrying their own loads and reaching out to help others with theirs.

The second group is doing its best, too. God called humankind to make the effort, not to produce results. As long as one is striving within their ability and strength, that is sufficient. Results are often dependent on factors out of their control. Paul and Apollos could do their best to preach the gospel, but if there was increase, it would be to God's credit. *"So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase"* (1Cor. 3:7). One can move mountains in trying to restore a fallen brother, but without his cooperation and repentance, his efforts will be unsuccessful (Gal. 6:1).

The third group is not doing its best, in spite of what they believe about themselves. They do not get to judge whether or not they are expending their best efforts, not in this world or in the world to come. Few can judge themselves objectively, and those who are in error even less so. They often judge themselves too generously. *"For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged"* (1Cor. 11:31). They need to stop making excuses for themselves and get back to work. They are not entitled to help.

I was concerned when I wrote this that it would be misunderstood. I was afraid the first group busy with taking care of themselves and others would feel guilty for not doing even more. I was afraid that the second group dealing with a temporary setback but determined to get back on their feet would feel guilty for accepting help on a temporary basis. And I was afraid that the third group who needed to read and profit from this article would rationalize their way out of applying it to themselves and their own situations. I would like to ask all three groups to make these fears unnecessary.

Christianity Is Not A Diet – It Is A Lifestyle

By Kent Heaton

The American culture is driven by the diet dogma. Sugar free drinks, low carb snacks, all natural health oriented weight saving products that attempt to slim down, reduce, shrink and manage the ever growing waist line. Obesity is a national concern with billions of dollars spent on how to, why to, where to and what to with every guru known to man hawking their wares of

enrichment and quick fixes. There are concerns over the roller coaster philosophy of diet today, lose control tomorrow and back on a diet the next day. New Year resolutions to lose weight change as often as the moon phase and often on the same calendar. The reason many do not lose weight is they are dieting instead of making life changes.

There is a similarity in how many people approach their life with Jesus Christ. It is treated as more of a fad than anything to be serious about on a daily basis. Some diet because they become concerned temporarily about their health and weight. After a time they lose interest and concern and return to the way they were before. Then they go on a diet again and up and down it goes. Sounds like the way some treat the word of God. It is good for emergencies and special needs when we feel guilty, but when we lose interest or concern it is laid aside and forgotten – until we need it again. The power of the gospel is not a short fix to solve a few problems but rather a long term remedy of the sin that so easily ensnares us (Heb. 12:1).

Psalms 1 shows how a relationship with the Lord is not a temporary fashion style we can enjoy one moment and lay aside for another. *“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper. The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish”* (Psalm 1:1-6). Day and night suggests the need for a constant impact of the word of God. This is a way of living and living a way that is rooted in the word of God.

After Moses died, the Lord encouraged Joshua to take the Book of the Law and not let it depart from his mouth. *“But you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success”* (Joshua 1:8). Losing weight is accomplished when a lifestyle is changed. Finding success with the word of God is a lifestyle measured by a daily meditation on the mind of God. Lacking the courage to instill the grace of God in our lives will only bring heartache and sorrow.

The apostle Paul was thankful that Timothy had made the word of God a daily habit. He reminds him of his childhood that taught him to love the word of God daily. *“But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”* (2Tim. 3:14-15). His word is inspired and will make us complete!