

“ANY EXCUSE IS AS GOOD AS ANOTHER”

Any excuse one might attempt for forsaking his service to the Almighty God of heaven and earth could only be baffling. However, an especially perplexing excuse that resurfaces from time to time is "I felt like I was serving God out of duty." "Somewhere along the line, people got the idea that duty is a bad thing; that duty is nothing but dreary drudgery. Modern society's emphasis upon recreation and pleasure, almost making such activities the reason for living, contributes to such thinking regarding duty. But must assuming duties toward others, especially toward God, be dreary?

Duty Enables Purpose

Many people float through life with no real aim or purpose. Closely linked with a lack of purpose is a missing sense of duty. In his comic strip, Snuffy Smith's wife Weezy regularly called him "you shif'less skonk"; describing a man with little drive or ambition, and apparently no sense of duty. Solomon called such a man the " sluggard" or "slothful man." He pointed out the superiority of an ant to a sluggard:

Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man (Proverbs 6:6- 11).

An ant does not need a guide, overseer, or ruler to force it to move. It knows what it needs to do, and does it.

The sluggard does not perceive that he has any duty; and thus, he has no purpose, no aim. Unfortunately many spiritual sluggards never embrace Christian duty, and thus never have any real spiritual aim or purpose. When one has duty, then one has goals. Once one has goals, then he can truly commit to them, thus providing aim in his life.

Duty Enables Dependability

It is a shame that there are so many intelligent and able-bodied individuals upon whom no one feels they can depend. No one can depend upon them because they refuse to accept duty. When someone takes on duty, it gives him opportunity to prove himself dependable. Contrariwise, one who refuses to accept duty demonstrates immaturity. But as Paul said, "*When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things*" (1 Corinthians 13:11).

Such childishness should not describe any adult, much less one who professes Christianity. *"But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel"* (1 Timothy 5:8; compare with 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12)

When a child of God says he is not going to perform his Christian duty because it is a duty, does he realize how undependable he declares himself to be? One who fails to assemble with the saints fails to serve his brethren (Hebrews 10:24-25). One who fails to serve his brethren sins against God (Galatians 6:2; compare with 1 John 3:4). Neither his Father nor his brethren can count on him, and neither can the Lord Who died for even the undependable. Do you wish to be someone on whom others feel they can depend? Duty makes this possible.

Duty Enables Accomplishment

Before one can accomplish anything, he must do what is necessary to attain that accomplishment. There are times when we simply do not feel like doing what must be done. Does this mean that we should simply leave it alone? No, what must be done must be done.

Consider all that the apostle Paul accomplished, taking the Gospel throughout Asia Minor and southern Europe:

I have therefore whereof I may glory through Jesus Christ in those things which pertain to God. For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed, through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation (Romans 15:17-20).

What if Paul would have said, "I really do not feel like going through all these places, it seems like too much of a duty?" Paul had a gargantuan duty entrusted to him, but his appreciation of that duty led him to accomplish great things through Christ that no man has excelled since. It is our duty and appreciation thereof which enables us to accomplish.

Duty Enables Reward

The Christian lives his life on earth with the confident expectation of a heavenly reward. And as is generally the case, duty must be performed before the reward can be received: *"Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor"* (1 Corinthians 3:8). In Christ's Parable of the Talents, those to whom their lord entrusted his talents were rewarded based upon how they had performed their duty. The two faithful servants were told, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter

thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matthew 25:23; emphasis LM). Because they had performed their duty, they were able to accomplish what their lord had in mind for them, they proved themselves dependable to their lord, and they were rewarded by their lord.

The apostle John wrote, *"And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them"* (Revelation 14:13). Until the Christian dies, he is to toil on in the service of the Lord (compare with Hebrews 4:10-11). When John wrote, "their works do follow them," he was not saying that Christians will resume these works after death. But the record and reward of their works in this life will follow Christians into the next life.

Christian Duty is a Delight

It is inexplicable that there are numerous children of God who have come to find Christian duty dreary. Imagine interviewing for a job; and when asking about the duties involved you are told, "You will be required to sing songs, to encourage others to do what is right, and to have constant fellowship with the only Perfect Being Who has ever existed." Who in his right mind would describe such duties as "dreary"? While duty generally is a blessing, the simple fact is no duty on earth is remotely comparable to Christian duty.

Is every aspect of Christian duty enjoyable? Certainly not! It is not enjoyable to tell people that they are lost, or that they must give up some of the earthly ties they hold most dear to be saved. It is not enjoyable to be persecuted, yet Christians through the ages have suffered terribly for their faith. Persecution is as unpleasant a part of Christian duty as there is; yet there is immense joy in persecution, and in any other unpleasantness, when it comes as part of Christian duty (Matthew 5:10-12; Acts 5:41; Philippians 1:29; 1 Peter 4:12-14).

If Christian duty seems dreary, one can be assured that the duty itself is not dreary. It is all in the mind. As Solomon observed, *"For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he"* (Proverbs 23:7). Sometimes people get a "thinking problem," and when they do it affects all else (4:23). If Christian duty ever seems dreary, the answer is not to take some "time off" from serving the Lord, but to throw oneself more wholeheartedly than ever into his Christian duties. Arrive early for every service of the church; focus more attentively on every aspect of the worship; spend more time in God's word; and privately pray more often, longer, and more thoughtfully. It has been well said, "If you act the way you wish you felt, eventually you will feel the way you act."

Conclusion

Duty enables one to be blessed in numerous ways; as it enables purpose, dependability, accomplishment, and reward. Christian duty is in itself great delight. However, duty only enables these privileges when duty is performed! Every accountable man and woman has been given duty toward his Creator. Let each not look on this as dreariness, but let each attend to that duty with the joy and delight that God intends.