

IF NOT NOW, THEN WHEN

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“If not now, when?” This little expression is a bothersome thing because it can be applied to so many areas of life. If I am not going to lose weight now, then when? If I am not going to work on the fallen leaves in the yard now, then when? If I am not going to finish that book (or books) I started now, then when? If I am not going to start saving a little more money now, then when? If I am not going to study my Bible now, then when? As you can see this list of applications has no end.

Since this is the case, let's center in on three: improving personal relationships, working to *grow spiritually and making our own calling and election sure* (2 Peter 1:10). First, consider personal relationships. I know that there are people who do not cherish the people in their lives, or perhaps prefer to have as few people as possible around. Most of us cannot live like that. Our families and friends are precious gifts that we indeed ought to cherish.

How does anybody improve the personal relationships in life? Well, the first step is to realize that the only person I can work on is me. I've had many more than one person come to me with personal relationship problems. The source of trouble becomes apparent when the individual begins to list all that's wrong with their family and friends, sometimes wanting help in “straightening out” these folks. The only person you can “straighten out” is you.

There are things that an individual can do in improving personal relationships. One is to think of others more than self. Another is to be sure to express appreciation for the people in your life to the people in your life. The Lord summed all this up by saying that *we ought to love one another* (John 13:34; see also the little book of 1 John). If we are not going to begin to do this now, then when?

The second area is “*working to grow spiritually*” (see 2 Peter 3:18). Spiritual growth is not magic, nor is it miraculous. It is the result of concerted effort on the part of a Christian person. I say person because it is so very helpful to see that spiritual growth is not something that is done to you, it is instead something you do with, to and for yourself. God is in it because He provides the motivation (Christ died for me, 1 Peter 1:18-19), the means (God's Word, Ephesians 6:10-17, 2 Timothy 3:15-17), and the method (Diligent effort, 2 Peter 1:10, 2 Timothy 2:15, 1 Timothy 4:12-16).

Yes, God is very much in the matter of spiritual growth, but it is left up to us to do it. Bible study just doesn't happen. Attendance at the services just doesn't happen. Visiting the suffering just doesn't happen. If we're not going to do these things now... then when?

So we come to our third area, the matter of our own salvation. We have alluded to Peter's words twice, here they are: Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if you do these things, ye shall never fall (2 Peter 1:10). Peter wrote this letter to Christians and this verse comes just after he presented the Christian graces. Peter is here doing more than encouraging Christian growth. He is teaching us to form up the very character of our lives around principles that flow from the mind of God. A Christian can be lost (2 Peter 2:20-22). But it will not happen if we do God's will. We may stumble, even fall. Then we repent, get up and go again. Paul told the Philippians to “*work out your own salvation*” (Philippians 2:12). If we don't do this now, then when.....?

As James said, “*Whereas you do not know what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away*” (4:14). Every one of us has something to do to make our lives better for us and more pleasing to God. The time to get busy is now. If not now, then when?