

It Is Written

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A Higher Standard

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The disciple of Jesus Christ lives by a higher standard than do those whose minds are set on the things of this earth. This is made clear by the words of the apostle Paul who exhorted the brethren in Colossae to “Set your mind on things above” (Col. 3:2) — to live for something greater than the things of this world. The exhortation was that they would first think of the heavenly [spiritual] things, leading to them then doing the spiritual things. The exhortation was also to excel, or to exceed the worldly goals, and become greater within themselves that they might attain to the greater treasures.

It is an exhortation for us today, too. We need to every day be living by that higher standard — doing the things that show others that our goal is the heavenly, not the earthly. We should be striving for the spiritual and leaving behind the physical. But how do we do that? Consider, for today, a few things that will demonstrate to the world that we live by a higher standard.

Loving Others. Recent events have demonstrated that those of the worldly mindset have no problem hating others who are not just like them, or who teach the very standard we are considering today as the one we should all be striving to uphold. We may remember that Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (John 13:34); we may also remember He added, “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (v. 35). Love is the characteristic of His disciples, so this should set us apart from those of the worldly mindset. Hatred is, in other words, unbecoming of disciples of Jesus Christ.

And Jesus didn’t just say to love those who think like we do, who look like we do, and who are in agreement with everything we say and do and believe. No, in fact what Jesus did say was, “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (Matt. 5:44). He would then ask, “For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?” (v. 46). The truth is, love for those who are friendly to us is the way of the world, but Jesus calls us to a higher standard, and calls us to love everyone — even those with whom we may vehemently disagree.

Being Content. The worldly mindset is one that follows after the latest trends in fashion, music, food, and whatever catches the collective public’s fancy, and is constantly chasing after whatever one does not have, rather than being content with whatever they have and wherever they may be in life. I know, because I have gone through that in my younger years — making myself miserable in the present because I was always looking for what was ‘next’ in life!

But God calls us, again, to a higher standard. Instead of joining in the daily ‘rat race’ and the habit of many to ‘keep up with the Joneses,’ God calls us to be content. Paul reminds us this is a learned behavior, writing, “I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need” (Phlp. 4:11, 12). In other words, wherever we may be in life, we need to be content with that, rather than envious of where someone else is or what someone else has.

God also teaches us, “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” (Heb. 13:5). If anything,

the world will sometimes notice this habit of ours simply because they do not see us chasing after every new thing or engage in materialistic behavior. That alone will make us stand out, and maybe give us an opportunity to talk about why we do not do those things.

Always Doing Our Best. It seems I read of something every year where someone is complaining about ‘the latest generation’ and their lack of work ethic. [It’s what we do when we are older — complain about ‘the younger generation.’] Recent articles point to a lack of desire in many today who just are uninterested in joining the workforce or, as some say, giving a day’s work for a day’s pay. This is more than just an interest in a healthy work/life balance, but a clear disinterest in labor.

The wise writer said many years ago, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going” (Eccl. 9:10). The injunction here to do our utmost is within the context of instructing the reader to enjoy whatever blessings he may have in life [ie., being content] because all of these pursuits end at death. But we should not overlook the admonition here to do our best in whatever it is we do. [Evil and ungodly things are necessarily excluded.]

Diligence is the word often used in the New Testament, especially relating to the things of the Lord. Paul admonished Timothy, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God” (2nd Tim. 2:15); the ESV, in fact, translates this as “Do your best,” and that is exactly the point! Paul also urged the brethren at Collosae, “And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men” (Col. 3:23). To those same brethren, he would exhort them, “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving” (Col. 2:6, 7). And Paul urged the brethren of Corinth to be “always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1st Cor. 15:58).

To the disciple of Jesus Christ, it is only logical that we who serve the one who gave Himself for us (Eph. 5:2; Gal. 2:20) would in return give themselves completely to the Lord and do our best in all that we do for Him. At the very least we should present our “bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God” because it is our “reasonable service”(Rom. 12:1). He deserves our best, and He deserves our all.

Putting God First. Let’s be honest: We are going to have a hard time convincing the world that God is the most important thing in life if they do not see that is true of our lives. How can we convince others that pleasing God is more important than pleasing self if they do not see in us a life that demonstrates such? When Jesus said, “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matt. 6:3), there is no room for debate or misinterpretation in those words. Jesus meant we need to put god first in our lives and in every aspect and corner of our lives. We cannot be ‘Sunday morning Christians’ or those who compartmentalize our faith and do not live it while we walk amongst those of the world!

For some, the struggle is putting God before family (Matt. 10:37); for others, it is putting God before their material possessions (Matt. 19:16-22); and for others, it is putting God before their peers (John 12:42, 43). Whatever it may be that comes before God, we must re-prioritize and put Him first! Again, it is only logical that the one who “so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”(John 3:16). should be first in our lives!

Let us never forget “our citizenship is in heaven” (Phlp. 3:20)!