

Make Your Life Bigger - Avoid The Weak Life Of Merely Avoiding Sin - Sometimes it's hard to get a handle on this whole issue of *living a big life*. Sometimes it's hard for us to think of practical ways of *taking up our cross*, or *losing our life* for the sake of Christ and the gospel. Some of you will remember the illustration I used about the Queen Mary. That great luxury ocean liner was turned into a troop carrier during World War Two. All of the luxuries were stripped bare. The ship was painted battleship gray. The luxury accommodations of 3000 sightseers were made to house 15000 soldiers. The fine silver and linens were replaced by a mess hall.

How can I know if I'm engaged in the war? What are some sure signs I really get the true, Scriptural picture of my role as a Christian in this world? I know of no better test than the one raised in this teaching this morning. ***Peacetime Christians gain their greatest satisfaction in merely avoiding sin. Wartime Christians find their greatest satisfaction in advancing the cause of the Great Commission.***

Peacetime Christians spend all their time asking "How can I find more inner peace?", or "How can I avoid stress?", or "How can I enjoy better health?", or "Is my church really meeting my needs?", or "Why can't I do such and such and still be a Christian?" **Wartime Christians** devote themselves to a totally different set of concerns. They devote their energies to issues like, "How can I simplify my lifestyle so more of my income can be used on the front lines of the battle?", or "Is there a needed skill in the ministry of my church, or the missions field, that I may not possess right now, but could learn with a little time and effort?", or "How many naked did I clothe, and how many hungry did I feed, and how many lonely have I visited in the name of Jesus?"

1) **IN THE NEW TESTAMENT THE CHRISTIAN LIFE WAS DESCRIBED SYNONYMOUSLY AS DOING THE "WORK OF THE LORD"**

1 Corinthians 15:58 - "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."

Notice the very intentional wording of that verse. The work of the Lord isn't just to be *dabbled* at. You devote yourself to it like a golfer devotes himself to his putting, or a concert pianist to his music. The work of the Lord is something Christians are to *abound* in. It doesn't get our leftovers. It's our priority.

Ephesians 4:11-13 - "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, [12] to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, [13] until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...."

How far is this verse from the modern church? Notice, the church doesn't get built up by avoiding sinful actions. There are atheists who avoid sinful actions. The body gets built up as each part labors in "*works of ministry*"(12).

Colossians 1:9-10 - "And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, [10] so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."

Question: How do Christians *increase "in the knowledge of God?"* Spiritual wisdom can't be gleaned just from reading and listening to sermons. People increase in the knowledge of God as they are *bearing fruit in every good work* (10). Without laboring for the Lord - just plain hard work for Jesus - people will be ever learning but never coming to a knowledge of the truth.

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 - "Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, [17] comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word."

Again, how do "*eternal comfort and good hope*" come into our lives? How do weak believers become strong disciples? How are *small* lives made *bigger*? Paul says we "*establish*" our hearts (what a wonderful phrase!) as we commit ourselves to doing good work for the Lord (17).

1 Timothy 4:8-10 - "...for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. [9] The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. [10] For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe."

Here Paul says the hope of the Second Coming of Jesus can be seen in our lives by the way it motivates us to "*toil*" and "*strive*"(10). Of course, any Christian can *talk* about the Second Coming. Anyone can say he "*believes*" in it as a point of orthodoxy. But people who actually *hope* in it use their muscles and money and brains to prepare for it.

2 Timothy 2:21 - "Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work."

Please notice, it's not nearly enough merely to be *clean*. Holiness is merely *preparatory* for *good works*. Are you *useful*? Are you *prepared for every good work*? The reason you get a driver's licence is so you can drive a car. And the reason you're called to holiness is so you can be "*useful to the master.*"

And something else. Notice the way Paul talks about getting "*ready*" or "*preparing*" for every good work. Think about that. He means there are some works you can't do right now. But are you getting ready - are you in training - are you *preparing* for them?

2) **IF THE DEFINING FEATURE OF OUR CHRISTIANITY IS MERELY THE AVOIDANCE OF SIN, OUR WITNESS FOR CHRIST IN THIS WORLD WILL LACK PASSION AND PUNGENCY**

The *avoidance ethic* is a totally inadequate vehicle to convey the beauty and magnificence of Jesus to this world. That's because Jesus Himself was never identified in the New Testament as the Person Who *didn't* do certain things. He certainly *was* sinless, but He was *known* for the things He *did* - for His *labor* for the sinful and the broken and the needy. He was known for the *power and authority of His teaching*. He was known for His *tireless prayer and intercession*. He was known for His *passion for those no one else had passion for*. He is never once described in the gospels as the One Who didn't steal or cheat or swear.

3) **PEOPLE WHO DEFINE THEIR CHRISTIAN LIFE MERELY BY THE AVOIDANCE OF SIN ALWAYS ASK THE WRONG QUESTIONS ABOUT MORAL ACTIONS**

This is the curse of the church and the systemic root of small lives. So many Christians reveal the shallowness of the purpose of their lives by asking questions rooted in the "*What's wrong with it*" ethic - the *avoidance* ethic. "What's wrong with this movie? What's wrong with this amusement? What's wrong with that club? What's wrong with dating this partner? What's wrong with being away from church every other weekend? What's wrong with this way of relaxing?"

This *virus of smallness* needs to be exposed. A much better question is *“What’s wrong with these questions?”* And what’s wrong with them is they betray a *purposeless existence*. The questions are all *negative*. They are question not aimed at any positive target. They empty the life of the asker.

If we are truly called to the *“work of the Lord,”* and if we are all involved in a *wartime mentality* for the kingdom, we will live life with a totally different set of questions. We will constantly find ourselves asking *more focused and purpose-driven questions* like, “How will this action help me treasure Christ more? How will this action *show others* that I treasure Christ more than life? How will this action advance the kingdom of God and win others to Christ?” How will this action *encourage* and *inspire* brothers and sisters in the church of Christ?”

If my whole life is aimed at the work of the Lord - if I live with the war-time mentality of advancing the cause of Christ - then everything I do will be questioned in the light of *how it helps with that cause*. The “what’s wrong with it” question will be seen as useless and irrelevant.

This is what Paul means in 1 Corinthians 10:31 - *“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*

This is an enormous life verse. It lifts all the sails into the spiritual wind. This is so much more than a verse about saying “grace” before meals. Paul is saying we are, as laborers of Christ, to make sure that everything we do, right down to the smallest details of our lives, *advances the calling of our lives - the glory of God and the cause of His Kingdom in this fallen world.*

4) ***IF WE LIVE OUR LIVES MERELY TO AVOID SIN THE CHURCH WILL CONSTANTLY LACK THE RESOURCES TO REACH THIS WORLD FOR CHRIST***

Avoiding sin may take *you* to heaven, but it will take *no one else*. Perhaps Jesus had this in the back of His mind when He spoke the most quoted words in the church today: Luke 10:2 - *“And he said to them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.’”*

There are two pleas for laborers in one verse. And Jesus is recruiting among His *followers*, not among *pagans*. If Jesus stood up at a church prayer meeting and voiced His prayer request, what would He say? He would say with tears streaming down His face, “Please pray for *workers* for the kingdom. Not more *believers*. More *workers!*”

The harvest won’t happen without your *work*. That’s it. It’s not rocket science. It doesn’t take *brilliance*. It doesn’t take some *special calling*. It doesn’t take some *special gifting*. Here’s what it takes to bring in the harvest - spell it with me - *“W” “O” “R” “K”*. The harvest takes work. It requires that every Christian in Cedarview sees himself or herself as called to the *“work of the Lord.”* Not just *saved*, but *called to the “work of the Lord.”*

Where are you involved in the *work of the Lord?* You must be able to answer that question. This has nothing to do with *not* smoking or swearing or drinking or lying or being into porn on the internet. It has nothing whatsoever to do with being faithful to your wife. I’m not asking at all about your *personal holiness* here. I’m asking about your response to Jesus’ call to follow Him into the *work of the Lord*.