

## WHAT WE DON'T DO

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I remember hearing a brother tell of an experience he had in meeting a man who seemed to be interested in our religion and who asked him about it.

The brother said, "I told him about our ways. I told him we don't do as the world does nor as the people of the worldly churches do. We don't go to theaters; we don't dance; we don't smoke or use tobacco in any form; we don't wear jewelry; we don't play cards or take part in any of the worldly amusements." Perhaps he told him more. I hope he did. But the above is what stands out in my recollection as the things he stressed most, and he seemed to be completely satisfied that he had given the "reason of the hope that is in you" and had well discharged his duty of giving testimony unto the world of the life of Jesus Christ.

Undoubtedly the above "don'ts" are of value in clearing the field for Christian life and activity. But they are wholly negative; that is, they consist of avoiding things that are unprofitable or harmful but do not represent the doing of any of the good things which our Lord has taught and explicitly commanded.

Would to God that beside the above, he had been able in truth to tell an interesting story of what we *do* do. That he might have said, in truth: "But we are very busy and active in other things - things which pertain to our Master's work, which He has bidden us to do. First, we have an unlimited field, in which we are very active, to carry the message of the Gospel to all men, as far as our strength goes. Every member is charged with the duty of telling his neighbor about the way of salvation through Jesus Christ and, like the apostolic church at Antioch, we send our laborers and ministers out into the harvest fields of the world to spread the gospel of true conversion, which is really so rare in the world today.

"And besides our labors in the Gospel, we are very busy carrying out our Master's command, 'Go thou and do likewise,' namely, as the Good Samaritan did, of whom the Lord tells in that parable, making it our Christian duty and privilege so far as our strength goes, to bind the wounds of the world. This same great field of labor is further pointed out to us when our Master says, 'I was hungry and ye fed me; I was thirsty and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger and ye took me in; naked and ye clothed me; I was sick and ye visited me; I was in prison and ye came unto me.' (Matt 25:35-36)

"Our religion makes it our duty not only to minister to the spiritual needs of the people but also to the physical and temporal needs of the needy. All this keeps us very busy in good works which our Master commands, so that we have neither time nor interest for the follies and frivolities of the world." Thus I wish the brother might have spoken.

But could he say all this in truth? Someone may answer, the above would be an ideal condition to which we can never hope to attain. Even if we were to grant this, the

question would still remain, Do we strive with all our strength for the above condition? Is the above really the ideal or aim of our religion?

Let us face facts squarely! Let us look squarely into the mirror and honestly admit what we see. I have tried to do this and have reached the firm conviction that "Don't" has found by far too large a place in our religion and "Do" by far too small a place. Not only do these "don'ts" fail to lead us into doing the Lord's will; there is another very real danger in them; namely, the danger that we should please ourselves too much and approve ourselves too much because of them. To the angel of the church of Laodicea the Lord spoke, "Thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable, and poor and blind and naked." (Rev 3.17) Thus we see it is possible to deceive ourselves and to have a feeling of richness and well-being which is not justified by the facts, when soberly faced. What a smug self-satisfaction have not some taken out of an array of petty negative virtues like the above and other similar ones. What a self-deception - like a drunken man jingling a handful of small coins in his pocket and feeling like a millionaire.

But what shall our attitude be toward these negative virtues? Shall we say that because they are purely negative and some of them of minor importance that they may well be discarded? That is not the right answer. That would be a serious step backward.

But let us not overvalue them as though they in themselves would make us acceptable to God.

These negative virtues should be looked upon as comparable to the farmer's activity in keeping down the weeds. That is a very necessary part of the farmer's work and most praiseworthy. With what pride and joy does not a farmer look at his field, and his good wife at her garden when between the rows of corn or vegetables the clean fallow earth is seen, free from noxious weeds. A clean field, a clean garden, what a joy to the husbandman!

But what would you say about a farmer who spends the entire summer plowing, harrowing, cultivating to destroy the weeds in his fields but who never thought of putting good seed into the fallowed soil. Would you not say he is crazy? And the conclusion would seem to be justified. When harvest time comes he would have nothing to show but a nice, clean, but unfruitful field. No harvest! No fruit! An unprofitable servant!

With him may be compared the Christian who devotes himself solely to the negative virtues - don't this, don't that - and who neglects the *do*, neglects to obey the Lord's commands and to enter whole-heartedly into the many fruitful labors which our Lord has commanded us to do.

But, let us not abandon our negative virtues, just because they are insufficient in themselves. That would be like a man who discovers that his investments have turned out badly, and that instead of being rich as he had thought, he is penniless, having only a clean record and some degree of credit as his entire capital. Would he be wise to throw these to the winds? No! He is very careful of them. These may sustain him until he can go to work and earn something.

And so, a conscience, which is unspotted by wrong doing, even though its virtue is only negative and by far insufficient to earn the praise, "Well done, thou good and

faithful servant," may yet be sufficient to sustain us while we sober up, take stock of our real assets, and *go to work*.

I understand Brother Fröhlich is the author of the following stanza, which I will quote in German and then paraphrase in English.

*Der Gnadenstuhl voll Stärke*

*Ist Armen aufgethan*

*Der Richterstuhl heißt Werke*

*Der Reiche nur kommt an!*

The gist of the above is: The throne of Grace is open to the poor, that is to sinners. The judgment throne calls for works (good works) and only he who is rich in good works can stand before it.

To be rich in good works means more, far more than don't! don't! don't! It means *do!* Carry out the Lord's commands! Do His work!

"Go ye forth into all the world, preach the gospel to every creature."

"Is it such a fast that I have chosen?...Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked that thou cover him, etc." (Isa 58.5-7)

Rich in good works! What a treasure laid up in heaven! Works done in the Lord!  
"Blessed are the dead, which die in the Lord from henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them." (Rev 14.13)

To close, a word to our elders and ministers: How often would your labors be easier, more blest and joyful if they were directed more to *lead* the flock into the Lord's work, into His harvest fields and vineyards, into works of kindness and mercy and helpfulness to humanity rather than to be obliged to spend so much time and energy in the often unpleasant and sometimes seemingly thankless task of trying to keep the fences fixed here and there, and of correcting and disciplining the large and small misdeeds that occur among the flock, misdeeds often the direct result of idleness, for "Satan always has some mischief for idle hands to do."