



*13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. 14 For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. (Ecl 12:13-14)*

*Ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do. (Luke 17:10b)*

In the easy-believism of the modern church, you will rarely, if ever, hear mention of the term DUTY unless appeal is made to the so-called duty to give and tithe more money than you can afford. The modern church is into making large its membership rolls to the detriment of true faith and the nurturing in God's Word. Just come forward and profess Jesus Christ (even if you have no idea WHO Jesus Christ is), and we will add your name to our membership rolls for all time and eternity without further ado. A large membership roll may impress worldly denominational leaders, but it will make no impression on the God of Heaven. He is not impressed with prestigious buildings, high steeples, elaborate vestments of gold-embroidered silk, miters, nasalized Oxford accents, etc. God is interested in the true heart of the individual believers who alone comprise the Church of God. He would prefer three souls of true faith meeting under a desert palm tree to one thousand phony professors meeting at St. Paul's Cathedral.

DUTY<sup>1</sup> is a hard term for the modern church because it insists faith must result in good works and action. And when one has performed all good works to the best of his ability<sup>2</sup>, no credit is due him for the doing – it was simply his duty! Duty is simply

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<sup>1</sup> Duty – Doing what you are supposed to do, regardless of those around you, regardless of “public opinion” or political correctness, then counting the cost afterwards.

<sup>2</sup> An interesting concept, in all things God asks us only to do our best, no less is acceptable to Him and no more is possible.

performing those minimum requirements of good faith and character that is expected of every believing Christian. It was the DUTY of the Temple priest to stop and help the wounded Jew on the Road to Jericho – he did not! It was the DUTY of the Levite to stop and offer help as well – he did not! But the hated and lowly Samaritan did his DUTY by stopping, helping the man as much as he could have done, expending expensive oils and wine on his wounds, bearing him on his beast of burden to an inn, caring for him there, and paying for his further care while he went to Jerusalem on business. Even the Good Samaritan has nothing to boast of for he simply did his DUTY.

Fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, neighbors – all have duties to observe. There are the duties of common humanity and courtesy, but also duties that one owes, first to God, and then to his fellow man. This complies with the Two Great Commandments of the Pentateuch which Jesus quoted to the obdurate lawyer: *37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.* (Matt 22:37-40)

I trust the reader needs no reminder a Commandment of God is not a suggestion of optional compliance? Even if we were able to keep these two Commandments without flaw, we still would have merely done our DUTY. This may not sit well with the silken-attired pulpit dandies of our day, but it is nonetheless spot-on Scripture. The modern church is more concerned in finding avenues to circumvent DUTY rather than in living up to their obligations under its mandate.

The rigorous duties of a soldier are many and varied. Sleeping at guard-mount warrants a capital punishment; but when the soldier stands his guard duty without sleeping once, is he commended for that? No, sir! He has simply performed his DUTY. The soldier has a DUTY to obey lawful orders without question or hesitation. If commanded to leave the trenches under heavy fire and join the line of battle, he must do so not expecting a commendation for obedience to that order – it was his DUTY. The soldier must be willing to lay down his life if necessary in defense of the nation and her colors. Military cemeteries from Arlington to Colleville-sur-Mer Military Cemetery at Omaha Beach; and from the Military Cemetery at Guadacanal to the “American Military Cemetery and Memorial which is in Manila, the Philippine Islands, and is the largest American military cemetery on foreign soil. Over 17,000 graves are arranged in a circular layout encompassing 125 acres. Constructed in the middle are two hemicycles, listing a staggering 36,282 names of Americans who lost their lives in the South Pacific during WWII and have no known resting place.” (from Tablets of the Missing)

Those missing men who sleep in the marshes and jungles of the Pacific, or in silent tombs of the deep of the ocean-seas, are not recognized for any special, above-the-call-of-duty, award; for they simply did their DUTY.

In God’s economy, there is no such thing as “above-and-beyond-the-call-of-duty.” The Roman Catholic doctrine of “works of supererogation” holds that one can do more than duty requires of him in the service of God. Really? What would that be? The Protestant Reformers rejected this prideful claim along with indulgencies, and that rejection is clearly stated in the 14<sup>th</sup> Article of the Articles of Religion of the Reformation Church of England. It was not the DUTY of our Lord to die for us – it was motivated by His unmitigated love for us that He deigned to do so. So, if we die for Him or for others, we have not done as much, being guilty of sins ourselves, as He has done without sin or blemish.

If that level of Love commanded in the Two Great Commandments recited by Christ is enshrined in the Temples of our Hearts, then DUTY need not be evoked, for love itself is its own cause and objective. When we feed a hungry animal by the wayside, our

actions are motivated by, at the least, an embryonic love for the creature. Compassion is the fruit of love that compels us to act always with mercy and sacrifice. There is no recorded episode in Scripture in which Christ did not have a deep compassion for every sinner that crossed his path. The only persons for whom Christ showed contempt were the self-righteous, the proud, and the propagators of error. These, ironically, were primarily those who were supposed to be loving and kind – the high clerics and priests of His day.

The professing Christian (who does more than profess by living out his faith) will acknowledge the right of the Maker to His Creation and His Creatures. The painting of the Last Supper cannot complain to da Vinci for the colors he used in the painting, and neither can the Christian complain to his Maker for the foils and foibles of life, or the sacrifice he is compelled by love to make. Though we may render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, we can, in no way, offer any gift to God that will enrich His Treasures in Heaven. All that we have and, in fact, all that we ARE, belongs to Him already. If the steam engine belongs to the ship's owner, then so does the energy and labor that the engine performs. So with our works of righteousness before God – it is the righteousness of Christ working through us and not our own.

What do you suppose the Lord means in the text from Luke 17:10? *Ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.* In saying we are 'unprofitable' servants, we are not saying we are worthless or anything of the like. We are saying we cannot do enough to earn our wages of salvation. Though the gentleman, BOAZ, of the Book of Ruth is an exception, most masters do not thank the hired servant for the labors they do for they are simply doing the least that is expected of them. So are we.

I believe the good Dr. Martin Luther misinterpreted the Book of James' claim that faith without works is dead. *14 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, 16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? 17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. 18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.* (James 2:14-18) Martin Luther was led to question the canonicity of the Book of James because it seemed, to Luther, to contradict his entire doctrine of Grace Alone; but it does not. Grace stands above and apart from all claims of salvation by works; however, true faith, ensuing from a mighty Grace, is compelled to good works. It is not an option. So good works are the evidence of strong faith – not the cause. *13 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.*** (Rev 14:13)

I will ask a sobering question, dear reader: Which works will follow YOU beyond Jordan Banks?