

The Most Difficult Test

by Wayne Goff

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lessons, or do we study at all? Do we participate in Bible class, or do we just sit there like “a knot on a log”? Rather than be **the most challenging test**, most brethren want a quick, jiffy-mix one-two-three point sermon with a spiffy “catch” that will leave them feeling good. Churches that are cancelling Sunday night services, shortening the number of sermons, and getting the “easiest” Bible class material they can find should stop for a moment and **examine themselves!** Are you “expediting the services” in order to go out and spread the Good News with others, or are you getting done with services early so you can beat the other churches to lunch?!

The church at Ephesus was commended by Christ for *“your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil...”* (Rev. 2:2). And still Jesus said they had **lost** their first love (v. 4)! The church at Laodicea said that they were *“rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing...”* (Rev. 3:17) — but Jesus said they were *“wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked”!* We cannot fool the Lord with our heartless dedication, or with our materially wealthy/spiritually poor service! Instead, **we are all to be “steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord”** (1 Cor. 15:58).

Our efforts spiritually are not based on doing what is the most difficult, but doing what is right with the circumstances which we have. God understands this better than we do. But we do need to examine our efforts and our heart and ask if we cannot do better. I know that we can. However, as brethren and churches continue to get weaker, we are setting ourselves up to be condemned by God! *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children”* (Hosea 4:6). If God warned a mighty church like that in Ephesus that He would remove the lamp stand from its place (Rev. 2:5), what do you think He will do with a lazy, stubborn and willful church today?

Naturally, brethren tend to judge *their efforts* based on all the other churches they know about. But the apostle Paul warned the Corinthians against doing just that! *“For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise”* (2 Cor. 10:12). We are to **“examine”** ourselves in the light of God’s Word (2 Cor. 13:5). We are to be assured that Christ Jesus is **“in us”!**

When Paul rebuked Corinth for their spiritual weakness and improper worship, he said: *“For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world”* (1 Cor. 11:31-32). So brethren, do some self-examining and self-judging! Better to take a good look at yourselves **now** and make the needed corrections than to think all is well and face God in the judgment unprepared! God’s Word **does** rebuke and chasten us — but only out of love that we might do better.

A basic standard of judgment in the area of “effort” would be this: work **harder** on your soul, in the church, and for eternity than you would for work, for secular education, or for sporting events! If you are giving less than this, then you need to ask yourself why. God gave the best of heaven to bring salvation within your grasp (Rom. 10:6-10)! Shouldn’t you respond with a heart of love, gratitude and hard work?

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