

Virtue Signaling

In today's culture, "virtue signaling" describes the act of making a public show of good behavior. Very often on social media, people virtue signal when they draw attention to their good and often politically correct behavior. So, rather than just living according to good moral principles, some really work to make sure others observe just how moral they are.

Jesus told the following parable in which one of two men were 'virtue signaling' by today's standards. *"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."* (Luke 18:10-14 NKJV)

Did you notice that the Pharisee was extremely proud of himself? He talked to God about how wonderful he was, and about all the important things that he does on a regular basis. The tax collector recognized his position before God. He looked at himself from God's perspective, seeing himself as a lowly sinner in a lost and undone condition. Jesus stated that the tax collector was justified in the sight of God and not the self-righteous Pharisee who boasted about all his virtues.

Long before social media existed, Jesus warned, *"Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven... But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing"* (Matthew 6:1,3 NKJV). We ought not to get caught up trying to show others how great we are to *"be seen by men."* If that's our goal, then Jesus would say, *"they have their reward."* (Matthew 6:5 NKJV)

Our aim should be *"...that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence."* (1 Tim. 2:2) In doing this we will have a good influence on others as we *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."* (Matthew 5:16 NKJV) The goal is not to impress others with our religion, but to live in such a way that God is glorified.

In the end, God sees past the outward 'signal.' *"For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."* (1 Samuel 16:7 NKJV) If our service is genuine, then it will please Him, even if no one else notices.

- by Josh McCord

"Fellowship Halls"

Many churches today build what they call "fellowship halls" or "fellowship buildings" (and now "family life centers") to accommodate their social and recreational activities, and even hire "fellowship ministers" to plan and supervise such activities. But such activities fall outside of the realm of scripturally authorized congregational work. The Greeks and the Romans were very much into feasting, games, contests, exercise, and entertainment, and they built baths, pools, gymnasiums, theaters, and stadiums to accommodate such; but churches of the Lord in that same time were into assembling together for worship, teaching, exhortation, edification, and they provided places to accommodate such. They were primarily interested in glorifying God and saving lost souls. They did not resort to gimmicks and carnal means to attract or keep the people. The gospel of Christ and the blessings that come through it were all they had and all they needed to offer the world.

Churches in the New Testament did not employ such things, but how they grew! Theirs was a spiritual mission with eternity in view. All they had with which to attract the lost was the gospel of Christ, themselves as living examples of that gospel, a Savior who was willing and able to save, fellowship with God and the children of God, and the hope of eternal life in heaven. They

did not resort to material gimmicks to attract and to hold the lost, nor should we. They knew the difference between their fellowship in Christ and what passes for "fellowship" in religion today. Let us emulate them.

- *by Bill Crews*

It's Hard, but Love Demands It

There are some difficult things that God commands us to do. It's hard, for example, to go to a brother or sister who has sinned, look them in the eye, and tell them that they must repent. It would be much easier to simply 'look the other way', but God says we must go to them (Luke 17:3). It's hard to approach a weak Christian, point out their serious neglect of duty, and urge them to turn back to God. It would be easier to just 'let it slide', but God says we must speak to them (Gal. 6:1). It's hard to finally withdraw yourself from a disciple who has sinned and refuses to repent. It would be easier to ignore the situation and act as though nothing had happened, but God says such action must be taken (1 Tim. 6:3-5). To all of you who obediently do these difficult things, we express our thanks and admiration. You are truly "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:13-16).

Now, may we say a word to those of you who might be on the receiving end of such actions? We hope that you understand that your brothers and sisters take no delight in doing such things. It gives them no perverse sense of pleasure. There is no morbid gratification that comes from this. Surely you can see that it is truly difficult. Your fellow Christians can think of a thousand things they would rather be doing. There is absolutely no enjoyment in this. But they do it anyway, because they know two things: 1) God commands them to do so, and 2) It is in your best interest. Please try to understand this, and if it becomes necessary for someone to come to you - in a conscientious effort to serve God and you - please respect them for it. Respect them, appreciate them, and love them for their deep concern for your soul. They are doing one of the really hard things that at God calls upon His people to do – and love demands it.

- *by Greg Gwin*