

God's quality way of life:

Quality - Make it a Way of Life

The words: *Quality - We make it a Way of Life* were emblazoned on one side of my company van. Many residents of British Columbia will recognize the phrase as an advertising logo of the British Columbia Telephone Company (locally known as "BC Tel") which it had displayed on hundreds of its vehicles. It was just one of the phrases used in recent years to discourage customers from moving their telecommunications business to the new competitors in the industry. It was also intended to encourage its employees to take pride in their work. Other such programs adopted by my former employer over the years were the "Towards Excellence" program made famous by Thomas J. Peters and the in-house "Best" programs in which employees were encouraged to claim that "we are the *best* men and women for the job"... that we are able to do our jobs better than anyone else... including our competitors.

Despite all this, I well remember one unfortunate experience which led me to believe that not all BC Tel employees really did make quality their way of life. This happened some years ago when I was helping out with the installation of a temporary telephone system for our church youth camp at Shawnigan Lake on southern Vancouver Island. In the midst of what we church members considered to be a "camp of the saints," it seemed for a while as though Satan had planted one of his representatives into our midst - a wolf in sheep's clothing - a BC Tel installer who obviously did *not* believe in quality even though the van he arrived in proclaimed that he did! The contrast was incredible; he stuck out like the proverbial sore thumb. While the camp staff, ministers and other helpers were cheerfully hard at work putting together their various parts of that year's summer camp, our BC Tel friend stood around with his hands in his pockets making excuses why the telephone work could not be done. While the former interspersed their labours with positive, Christian talk, the latter fouled the air with blasphemy and cursing. He did not give God's people the quality telephone system which had been requested and paid for. He certainly did not give anything which resembled quality service.

After many prayers being offered up regarding the situation, the events of the following day were like a refreshing dawn following a dark and dismal night. God responded by sending us four telephone installers and two supervisors, all of them hard-working, cheerful, in positive attitudes and with the ability to speak somewhat better English. They completed the job... and it was a quality job!

What about you? Do you believe in quality, excellence, always giving your very best? Does God have anything to say on the subject of quality and excellence? Yes, He does. He has lots to say about it in His written Word. In this article I would like to show you that God really does want every one of His children to make quality our way of life!

The English word "quality" does not appear in the Bible but the similar words "excellence" and "best" (the other BC Tel buzz-words) do. There is a great deal of material throughout the Word of God which proves that He lives quality and that He wants us to do so too. Let us home in on just two points:

Christians are to grow in excellence

In his natural state, could man be described as inherently excellent? Many philosophers think that man *is* excellent, that he is the fabulous end product of an evolutionary line. But what does God say?

Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. (Psalm 39:5 KJV)

God inspired His servant David to announce that, in his very best state, man is vanity. Not quality. Not excellence. Vanity! Let me ask you another question. If God says that man is just vanity, is there *anyone* who inherently possesses true quality and excellence?

Let them praise the name of the LORD: for His name alone is excellent; His glory is above the earth and heaven. (Psalm 148:13)

This scripture informs us that God's name alone is excellent. God's names are not just titles. God is named for what He does and for what He is. But what about human beings? What about Christians? Are we cut off from true quality and excellence? Although God made man "very good" (Genesis 1:31), He purposely made him temporary and incomplete:

While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. (II Corinthians 4:18)

That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (II Timothy 3:17)

But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. (James 1:4)

The contexts of II Timothy 3:17 and James 1:4 show that perfection is a quality that is not inherent in humans and that it has to be worked toward in a partnership between God and each Christian. Hence, the phrase "be perfect" in these two verses might be better rendered as "become perfect."

Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:.. and this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:4-6; 9-11)

Paul was writing here to the Philippi congregation of the Church of God. He was writing about their growth from their state of vanity prior to their conversion (at which time God's good work was begun in them) up to that time - approximately 60 A.D. - and through to a future state of perfection at the return of Jesus Christ. Paul's mention of excellence in verse 10 is associated with the Philippians' increase in true Christian love, knowledge, discernment and the fruits of righteousness.

True quality depends on a Christian's outgoing love

Before looking into God's Word again, let us consider the statement in the above subtitle: "True quality depends on a Christian's outgoing love." It makes sense that, if we love our brethren, we will put quality into serving them. If we love our families, we will strive to put quality into our relationship with each family member. If we love God, we will put quality into everything we do for Him - praying, studying, fasting, meditating, tithing, offering and obeying. If we have love for our employers, colleagues and customers at work, we will put quality into whatever we do for them.

But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way. (I Corinthians 12:31)

Wow! Two BC Tel buzz-words in the same verse: "best" and "excellent"! But what is Paul writing about here? This verse appears to serve as a kind of bridge between the subject matter of the twelfth and thirteenth chapters of his first epistle to the Corinthians. Chapter twelve deals with various functions and positions within God's church. Paul calls them "gifts" and here instructs the people of the Corinth congregation (and, by extension, all of God's people) to earnestly desire and pursue the "best gifts"... or "the more valuable spiritual gifts" as the Modern Language Version has it... or "the higher gifts" according to the Revised Standard Version. He then says that he will show us a more excellent way and launches right into chapter thirteen, the very well known "love" chapter.

What is God teaching us here in this powerful little verse? He is showing us that, from His point of view, true quality and excellence do not depend upon one's rank, function or position in His church. God does not consider us to be of lower quality or to have less ability to give quality just because we are not all evangelists, ministers or deacons. Rather, as Philippians 1:9-10 mentioned earlier, a Christian's true quality is directly proportional to his or her outgoing love.

One final sub-point: Quality and excellence do not always have to cost more money. This can be true on the human plane but is even more relevant from God's point of view. As an example, let us take a look at what Jesus thought of the widow's mites:

And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And He called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living. (Mark 12:41-44)

This lady's tiny offering was nowhere near the magnitude of the huge sums given by the rich. But it was one hundred percent of what she had and, like that of Abel, it was a righteous offering in God's eyes because of the excellent attitude that was behind it.

In all areas of our lives: at home in our families, at work, in church activities and in our relationship with God, whatever He has given us to do, let us do it with all of our might. In future, whenever you see a telephone company van, say to yourself: "Church of God - Quality - WE make it a way of life!"

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