

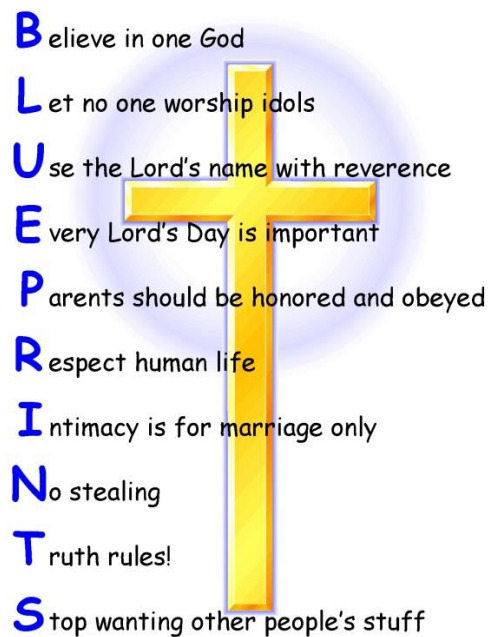
St. Andrew's Anglican Church – Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Various

“Why Do You Do What You Do?”

For the third week in a row our Gospel message is on the “Bread of Life.” Jesus’ Body and Blood is what this service is all about – following after the Word of God. I prayed about what I should speak to you about and so today is really what you might consider part 2 of a series. Last week I spoke to you about the Apostle Paul’s view of Christian behavior from Ephesians chapter 4. Behavior –an interesting word; its definition by the way is *“the way in which one acts or conducts oneself, especially toward others.”* I can’t think of a better example of how one’s behavior should be than God’s very own words: the Ten Commandments. The Lord begins with four commandments dealing with our behavior towards God Himself (vertical), and then the next six – (horizontal) with how we are to behave toward one another. In my teaching the Ten Commandments, I have given the students a handout called “Blueprints.” Each letter of the word starts a behavior that correlates to the commandment. It is great to put on the bulletin board or refrigerator!



I think that this is one of the clearest representations of the Ten Commandments and perfectly written so that young people (of all ages) can understand – and they can take ownership of. You see – God cares about our behavior. He wants each one of us to understand “why you do what you do!”

Believe me, God has a lot to say about our behavior. When Jesus was asked by one of the Temple “lawyers” who set out to trap and test Jesus by saying: *“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”* Jesus said to him, *“YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.”* *“This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, YOU SHALL*

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LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF. 'On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.' (Matthew 22:36-40) The first four are covered by the First and great commandment, and the last 6 in the second. This is the Summary of the Law that I pray near the very beginning of the service – after the Collect for Purity. Jesus quoted to this lawyer of the Temple the words of one of the most powerful prayers that every good Jew would be familiar with, (these words are in a scroll inside the mezuzah at the doorpost of each home) called “the Shema” from Deuteronomy 6:4-5 “*Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*” God spent a great deal of time with Moses giving the Law to the people of Israel – in order that they might try to behave rightly or “righteously.” As King Solomon himself said in Ecclesiastes 1:9 (and repeated throughout that book) “*There is nothing new under the sun.*” When God wants us to get the point and to clean up our act – with right behavior – He often repeats Himself - giving us the opportunity to understand and to do it.

God did not put the Law into place for His own good – but for the good of mankind – so that we would have some kind of guide for our actions, and an understanding that there are consequences for our actions - especially wrong actions. Sadly there are some people who call themselves “Christians” who profess that there are NO consequences, omitting references to sin from their “revised lectionary” and carefully avoiding verses that refer to sin and its cost. Let me tell you of an experience that I had as a fairly new priest and it really shook me up! When I was in Western New York the former bishop, J. Michael Garrison, in the Episcopal Church, would skip the confession and absolution in Holy Eucharist services because he said saw no need for it. At one service, at St. Bart’s old building, (before we left the Episcopal Church) when we started the confession – the bishop looked at me and whispered to me that I should grant the absolution. Liturgically (or in the order of the church) – a bishop is supposed to give blessings and absolution when he is present – it says so right in the prayer book. Why did he do what he did? The Apostle Paul spelled out what the consequence is: “*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” (Romans 6:23) Ironically, when I would say this to the Confirmation class – they had no idea what a wage was. How many of us had a paper route, or a lemonade stand when were younger, just to raise some money? Those were the wages – what we earned. What good is it avoiding Scripture and prayers that are convicting? You are only fooling yourself!

I think each one of us needs to ask ourselves this question: “**why do you do what you do?**” You can only answer these with complete and total truth. For example –

- Ask yourself why do you come to St. Andrew’s? Do you come for worship, for joy, for guilt, for you - or for someone else?
- Why do you live in Douglas or Coffee County, Cordele or even in Waycross?
- Why does a person lie to their spouse? Or lie to others - which can lead to other even more telling questions!
- Why do people cheat on their spouse? Or cheat on their taxes?
- Why do people take things that are not theirs?

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- Why do people drink more than they should?
- Why do some people refuse to love Jesus? Or refuse to love and trust God?
- Why do people disrespect others? – Which can lead to all forms of abuse – verbal, physical or emotional – right?
- Why do people want to hurt themselves? Believe me – it happens!

I cannot even begin to tell you how many young people I have met with over the years who have confessed to me that they have cut themselves. They don't have a good sense of self-worth. The answer to that is that God loves you SO much that He would die for you!

There are so many things in our lives that we can evaluate with this one simple question. It is a powerful and important self-assessment tool. Your behavior has an impact on you and on others. Everything that we do – our behavior – should be filtered through this very telling question – **why do you do what you do?** Many of us are more concerned with the number of “likes” that we get on a Facebook or Instagram post – than with how we are treating one another.

St. Paul in his letter to the Romans does not shy away from proclaiming the truth about sin – and about the choices we make. Please turn with me to page 1753 in your Pew Bible, to Romans chapter 7, beginning with verse 15. He says *“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.” “And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.” “As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.” “For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.” “For I do not do the good I want to do; but the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing.” “Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.”* (Romans 7:15-20) In spite of this being somewhat confusing, which I think Paul could have phrased a lot differently – we need to run it through our filter – **why do you do what you do?** God has given us so many choices – the choice to choose good over evil, to choose kindness instead of hatred, the right to choose peace over conflict, the right to choose life! We must include in our choices the most important one – to choose Jesus and eternal life – OR to choose one of the other alternatives – and its eternal consequence.

We cannot make decisions for other people – and that is why God gave each of us the freedom to do what we want or need to do. Each and every day we are faced with hundreds if not thousands of choices that we make – some of which we might wish we could do over. That is why I ask each of us to consider why we make the choices we make.

Let me ask you this – why did Jesus willingly allow Himself to be tortured to within an inch of His life? Why did He leave the comfort and amazing peace of His Heavenly throne – to take on human flesh and everything that goes along with it? Why did Jesus allow Himself to be nailed to the cross, giving Himself up for each one of us? Would you do that for someone else? Jesus loves us THAT MUCH! He loves us so much that we need **only accept Him as Lord** of our

life – and **believe in Him**, and then we will know that without a shadow of a doubt that we will share eternity along with Him. Let's turn to page 1816 to Ephesians chapter 2 verse 8: "*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--*" *"not by works, so that no one can boast."* (Ephesians 2:8-9) We do not need to do anything else to be saved, except believe! When we believe, then we want to repent of our sin – to have a right relationship with God. What needs to be done has ALREADY been done on the cross – done once, for all!

We cannot “earn our way to heaven” – but the things that we do should have purpose, besides having consequence. I am sorry to tell you that some people think that “what they do” will get them to heaven, to earn them a spot in eternity – or to get them out of some “mythical holding jail or holding place.” I do not know how we ever came to this – to think that a God who loves us enough to send His Son, would want to send people to a “holding tank;” to send them to a place where others would pray them out; it has ALREADY been done! What we do should be because of an awesome sense of gratitude for the saving grace that we have received and so then we want to do for others, NOT to get them out of purgatory, but simply to thank God for the precious gift of life that He has given to us – through faith in Jesus Christ. Faith and works do go hand in hand!

The Apostle James writes in James 2:14: "*What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?*" He goes on to say in verse 17: "*In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*" We are called through an “attitude of gratitude” or as I love to say “grateful obedience” to serve one another – for the sake of Jesus Christ. That is a great answer to the question “**why do you do what you do?**” Don't you think?

If we could get to heaven just by being “a good person” – why would God send His Son, Jesus to suffer and die? Jesus' sacrifice on the cross on our behalf, and our belief in His sacrifice is key. Please turn with me to page 1809, Galatians chapter 2, verse 20 (I am asking you to page through these verses so that you will remember where they are and so you can remember what they said and then you can go back to them and refer to them. There is nothing greater than to be in the Word!) "*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*" And that is the truth!

Our works, whatever we do, are visible to others – just as are the consequences. We may think that no one sees some of the things that we do, or have done – but I guarantee you that God does, and He has seen! Last week I asked the question – “**who are you when no one is looking?**” This goes hand in hand with “**why do you do what you do?**”

- Are you the same person to everyone you meet?
- Are you the same person 24-7?
- Are you the same person in every situation, and if not – why not?

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Please remember this: "***Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.***" (Hebrews 13:8) He is the same – always, never changing. He is the One constant that is our north; we can always refer to Him. It is also important to remember that God loves us – but it can be our behavior that He does not love! And so Jesus Christ went to the cross – so that our behavior can be forgiven, when we repent and ask for His forgiveness – He says “what sin?”

As we leave here today – and you hopefully reflect on the question raised: “Why do you do what you do?” – please keep in mind the words from Colossians 3:17 “*Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*”