

Good habits for Christians
The Christian Life
Do Good to all - Galatians chapter 6 v.10

[New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]

“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians chapter 6 verse 10).

This is the verse we are considering today and is the latest in our series on good habits for Christians. We should all find this very challenging. It does cut across what we often see in our culture today, where the prevailing mantra seems to be “what’s in it for me?” I have been greatly encouraged in these unprecedented days that we have experienced since March, that there seems to have been a move back to caring and looking out for one another in a way, which seems to have been more prevalent many years ago, when the sense of community was stronger.

As challenging as this is though, when we put it against the backdrop of the world in which the Apostle Paul was writing these words, it takes on a whole new level of meaning. He is quite clear that we should look for opportunity to do good to “all”, but especially to the household of faith, that is, the Christian Church. Perhaps, if you are like me, it is relatively easy to show kindness to those we know and love. There is also no doubt that when we meet a fellow believer for the first time there is an immediate bond that would help us do good to them, but what about the “all” part of our verse? Who would they be in Paul’s day and what does that mean for us today? I want to think about this and also what “doing good” really means.

Perhaps some background to the epistle in general would help as we think about these things. He is not writing to one group of believers here as he did when he wrote to the Corinthians. This letter is written to all the gatherings of Christians throughout the whole region of Galatia. At the time of the Roman Empire, this was a large region covering most of what is now Turkey. It would seem the letter was written sometime between A.D. 55 and 60 and was not during his two-year imprisonment in Rome, when he wrote many of his other letters; these came slightly later. It also varies from some of the other epistles as it is not so much concerned with explaining the Gospel, like for example Romans, but rather defending it.

In the fourth verse of the first chapter, he reminds them that they have been delivered through the sacrifice of Christ from the present evil age in which they lived. As we go through the epistle, he makes it clear that the law, the flesh, and the world are all grouped together. The law was given in order to curb the flesh, that which is from our nature, in order to make the world a better place; and in line with what God had in mind from the beginning. This did not work and indeed was never going to work; and he tells us in chapter 3 that the law was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. On the other hand, the Gospel brings in faith and the working of the Holy Spirit, which delivers the believer out of this world. There are two very clear things we need to keep in mind in thinking about these things. Firstly, our doing good is borne out of the fact that we now have been brought under grace which makes us fit for God; and not in some way to make us fit for God in our own

righteousness. Secondly, our doing good is not designed to make the world a better place just as the law could not do, but rather to bring individuals into blessing.

There was a major problem amongst these believers here in Galatia and indeed in other places to which Paul addressed letters. This was that those who had been converted to Christ through the preaching of the Gospel had been brought up Jews and were immersed in the Jewish religion. There was no greater example of this than Paul himself. The Jewish religion, although established by God himself in the Old Testament, was a set of rules, laws, covenants, and statutes that people found impossible to keep, and yet spent a great deal of effort trying. Indeed, for many people such as Paul, the keeping of these rules became the main and only focus of their lives. How many man-made concepts, religions and ideas are like this today? Even in the field of health and fitness, many are enslaved by trying to look a certain way and will go to any means to accomplish this, even to risking their life, if they feel this is not achievable through natural means. If we think about the ten commandments, it is made clear in the New Testament that if we fail in one, we are guilty of all. Yet how many people are ensnared into thinking this is still the way of gaining God's blessing and so will continue to strive anyway?

So, for many of these believers it was a real challenge to turn away from something they had been brought up in all their lives and was now to be superseded by grace. The whole complex system of life had been based on the various rules and observances, laid down in the Old Testament and then added to by centuries of tradition. The temple and synagogues were regulated by rituals and sacrifices; and personal lives were dominated by a legal code of conduct. Every aspect of life had come to be judged by external compliance to this minefield of regulation. What Christ taught and then was confirmed through the apostles as directed by the Holy Spirit of God is totally different. It is all about what is on the inside; it is a heart matter.

There was a problem in that there were men who did not want to accept this new faith and still harked back to that which was of the old way. They had infiltrated the Church on the premise that they were actual believers and had converted to Christianity, while all the time their main aim was to destroy the faith of the Christians and ruin their testimony. They had the same aim as Paul did before his Damascus road conversion when, as Saul of Tarsus, he used violence in order to destroy the Church. These men were using fine words and powerful persuasion. The problem was it was working and in the early chapters of Galatians we have the details of the dissension that was caused among the apostles by this teaching, that aspects of the law still had to be adhered to as salvation was not just by faith in Christ. In Acts chapter 20, Paul warns the believers that "savage wolves" will arise seeking to scatter the Church.

As well as these men seeking to disrupt the Church from within, there were the leaders of the Jews who were quite openly seeking to destroy it. Then, of course, there were the Romans who were seeking to hold onto their power in whatever way they felt was needed; and it was this very objective that caused them to deliver the Lord to be crucified. The Romans also even made the murder and torture of the early Christians a perverted source of entertainment in their vast stadiums.

So surely men like these should be dealt with in the most severe manner? No, Paul says, we should look for every opportunity to do them good! This concept was radical and different, but it was this very thing that had been taught by Christ from the very beginning of His public ministry. I often wonder what the reactions would have been to those who heard these things first-hand! We should be so thankful that those early disciples, who heard it, were so attracted to it that they gave up their whole lives to follow the Lord, took the Gospel to all the world and, for many, ultimately laid down their lives because of it.

So what is that they heard? If you look at the meaning of 'doing good' in a dictionary, you will find something along the lines of "doing things that are for the good of others and performing actions

that benefit others rather than ourselves.” If we think of what the Lord taught in His public ministry it is exactly this, but it is taken to a whole new level by His instruction as to whom this should be directed. Very early in the Lord’s ministry, we have recorded in Matthew chapter 5 and Luke chapter 6 some of the most radical teaching on doing good that we will ever encounter anywhere; and then all throughout the Gospels we see this being re-emphasised. We are instructed to love our enemies and do good to those who hate you, to bless those who curse you. Paul expands on these thoughts in Romans chapter 12 verse 20, when he gives us workable examples of what this means in practice. If your enemy is hungry, give him food or thirsty, give him drink.

In Luke chapter 6 verse 29, the Lord then instructs us to turn the other cheek. Also, if someone takes an item of clothing then we should give them another; or steals our goods not to ask for them back. He is teaching His disciples that they should be like Him and be prepared to give everything for someone else’s blessing, as He was going to do throughout His life and ultimately at the cross. Paul tells us again in Romans chapter 12 verse 20 that by doing this we are heaping coals of fire on someone’s head. Although Paul is quoting from Proverbs chapter 25 verse 22, it is evident that this was not what was prevalent amongst the Jews. The idea behind this statement is that by making someone very uncomfortable, it should prompt them to enquire and God should be glorified as a result.

In verse 31 of Luke chapter 6, we get another statement which has now become common in this country and trips off the tongue very easily, “And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.” This has many practical implications. Would we react to something that someone has said or done in a way that we would not want or expect them to react to us? We could even use this as an excuse to react to someone in a wrong way by saying that we would have expected them to react like that so that is what I am doing. This is certainly not the force behind these things!

The Lord then goes on to explain that if we only love and do good to those who reciprocate, then we are just the same as everybody else. We are instead to show mercy to all just as our Father is merciful to all, as is explained in verse 36 of Luke chapter 6. It was this boundless mercy of God that Christ came into this world to demonstrate; and this He did all through His life. In Acts chapter 10 verse 38 we get these powerful words: “How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.” So it is clear that if we are to be Christ-like, going about doing good should be a primary objective for us, as it was to be for those early disciples.

It is then also important for us to remember that this perfect life of Christ, shown in all its worth as He went about doing good to all, was to be given up in death on the cross of Calvary. His perfect life was the working out of the Old Testament types of the sacrificial lamb that was to be perfect, as seen perhaps most clearly in Exodus chapter 12. The fact that the lamb was perfect was not itself enough, but it had to be killed and its blood put on the door posts and the lintel of the house. The perfect life of Christ was not just to give us an example of the perfect life for us to try to live up to. It was so that the perfect life could be offered up in death as a sacrifice for sin. Thanks be to God that our salvation is based entirely on this sacrificial death rather than our attempts to live up to His perfect life!

I also feel it is important to think a little about our attempts to live up to His perfect example. We have already thought of the fact that we can never be perfect in this life because the human nature that we all still have, which the Bible often refers to as “the flesh”, will be with us until we leave this world. This, therefore, has two contrasting outcomes for us to consider. Firstly, we should never get too down with our shortcomings; and secondly never then let the devil convince us to give up trying, as we can never attain to it anyway.

Even the disciples, as they were in the Lord's company, often missed opportunities afforded to them to do good. In the story of the feeding of the five thousand, in Luke chapter 9, the disciples were tired after a hard day's work and suggested they should send the multitudes away because they had no food for them. They missed the point that the Lord was all sufficient and He was able to teach them a valuable lesson that day, but I would have felt the same as them in that situation. Then, in Luke chapter 18, as parents were bringing young children to the Lord to bless them, the disciples told them off and wanted to send them away. Surely the Lord was too busy to be bothered by little children they must have thought! Perhaps the most surprising situation though was in the garden as the Lord was arrested and Peter took a sword and cut off the ear of the High Priest's servant. Is that really surprising? How would I have reacted in such a hostile and frightening situation? Imagine the darkness, the aggression filled voices, and yet these men had heard the Lord teach, such a relatively short time before, to turn the other cheek. So, we need to take comfort from this when we feel we have missed an opportunity to do good.

Then there are three of the most well-used Gospel messages, where doing good is used by the Lord to show how far short someone is, in their own strength, to please God. In Luke chapter 10, we read of the lawyer who was keen to establish what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. He seemed to know the law, but did he practise it? He seemed to be more concerned with the detail than the practical application; and was then given this wonderful illustration of who his neighbour is, when the Lord told the story of the Good Samaritan. He was told very forcibly to go and do likewise. In Luke chapter 16 we meet a rich man who ignored the beggar named Lazarus who sat at his gate hungry. The rich man ended up being tormented in Hades after he died, not as a punishment for neglecting the beggar, but rather his neglect of the poor was the evidence that showed his true motives and desires of his heart throughout his life, that being this world's wealth with no thought for God or anybody else. Finally, in Luke chapter 18, we read about another rich man. This time he was young and seemed to be a very fine upstanding young man, who was confident that he had kept the law from his youth. However, the all-knowing Lord knew the one thing that would be a challenge too far for him, sell everything you have and give it to the poor! The other disciples had already shown this commitment and left their careers and followed the Lord completely. This young man could not commit to this level of doing good and went away sorrowful.

So we have a duty to all men as being connected by creation and we should never lose sight of this. We are not to be sectarian or to show favouritism in our good works, as we saw in the Good Samaritan, who showed great care and mercy for the Jewish man who would normally have been his sworn enemy. By redemption and its results, we have another, far deeper, connection to other believers, the household of faith. This is a spiritual connection and the spiritual always takes precedent over the natural; and so the apostle finishes our verse by reminding us of our first priority as being to the household of faith. This should certainly have the effect of making us even more busy in doing good, rather than give us an excuse just to stay within our own group.

It is clear that the fellowship of the people of God was important in those early days. The New Testament writers often mentioned fondly other believers in different places, who were dear to them and their friendship meant so much. Hospitality was important and it is listed as being a requirement for an overseer in the local gathering of believers in 1 Timothy chapter 3 verse 2. It is in this less formal setting that we can see what good work is required amongst the household of faith, which can often be less obvious than that which is required in the sad world around us. Again, these events of recent months should make us all the more appreciative of Christian fellowship.

Finally, I would just like to mention that I believe it is vital for each of us to be prayerfully mindful of the many needs around us where there is opportunity to do good. Then as we are aware of these things, never let us feel we are the ones to deal with them all. We should always be willing to

acknowledge what our skills, knowledge, experience, resources of time and money, are best suited to; and put these to good use as the Lord directs.

Thank you for listening to this message which is entitled “Do good to all” talk T1175, and I trust it will be a real encouragement to us all.

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