



# GOOD WORKS

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## BASIC CONSIDERATIONS

Good works and the Christian life are virtually synonymous. No life that is devoid of good works can truly be described as Christian. The New Testament, which reveals "all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3), stresses the concept of good works time and time again. The phrase "good works" is used at least twenty times, and words or phrases that express the same basic idea are used many more times. A study of this subject should prove profitable to any Christian who is sincerely concerned with fulfilling God's purpose in his life.

Although the scope of good works in its broadest sense pertains to all acts and words of the Christian life, including Bible study, worship, etc., the emphasis in this series of lessons is on the relationship of the Christian to his fellow men; that is, all those acts and words which render good to others.

### *The Heart of True Religion*

That God commands us to serve others, to manifest fidelity in all our human relationships, to render justice, mercy, righteousness, and benevolence to our fellow men, is plainly evident to every one who has carefully studied the divine word. Indeed, the very heart of true religion involves the proper relationship of God's children to others. Cf. James 1:27. This conclusion is obvious when we recognize the importance of man in the eyes of Deity. Since he is made in the image of God, his welfare is God's basic concern. That is why God sent His only begotten Son into this world to serve man. That is why He has given man the Bible. That is why He has ordained that those who are saved by Christ should serve others. In every good gift He has given man, He has expressed His regard for the infinite worth of His noblest creation. Human beings are the principal recipients of His goodness, and so must they also be of the goodness of all His followers.

The truism that the service we render others is the heart of the religion of Christ is the central idea of the Lord's description of the last judgment, recorded in Matthew 25:31-46. It is noteworthy and significant that nothing at all is said in this description about how often the Lord's faithful ones, His sheep, partook of the Lord's supper, how often they read the Bible, how often they prayed, etc. As important as all these things are in the life of the Christian and in his preparation for heaven, they are meaningless without the good works that involve the service of others. Thus the Lord would indelibly impress on our hearts and minds the significance of Christian service as the heart of true religion.

The Lord also stresses in this vivid judgment scene the importance of good works in our human relationships by affirming that the service we

render others is service we render Him, and that the service we fail to render others is service we fail to render Him: "Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, and fed thee? or athirst, and gave thee drink? And when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? And when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them. Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me . . . Then shall they also answer, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these least, ye did it not unto me" (verses 37-40; 44,45). Read these verses again, and then once and for all understand that no one can occupy a correct relationship with Christ who does not occupy a correct relationship with men.

The Lord affirms that He does not even accept our devotions to Him unless our relationship with others is correct: "If therefore thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matthew 5:23,24). How can any one read such utterances of our Lord as this and fail to see that serving others is the very heart and core of Christian living, of the true religious life?

### *Religion Without Good Works*

In contradiction of the Lord's teaching, the pharisaical orthodoxy that prevails in many circles within the church would virtually limit loyalty to Christ to such formal expressions of religion as Bible study, church-going, prayer, affirmation of doctrinal soundness, etc. Thus, instead of these things being the means of prompting and stimulating good works, they are used as a substitute or cover up for our lack of basic goodness in the service God expects us to render others. And these formal religious expressions are also used to bolster our self-esteem so that we can boast to the world how sound we are in the faith. How we do indeed love to boast about our loyalty to the Bible, how we faithfully follow the divine pattern in worship, practice, and teaching! Even in the advertising appeals we make to others, our pride and self-righteousness are made to stand out like the proverbial sore thumb: "Attend services at the church of Christ in your community. You can expect to find a people that have a wholesome respect for the word of God, etc., etc." But the plain, embarrassing fact is that those who attend the services of a typical congregation of the Lord's people will be greatly disappointed if their expectations are according to the foregoing claim and they look below the service to see us as we really are. They will find that many, if not the majority, of us do *not* have a wholesome respect for God's word in those

matters that pertain to the sacrifice of self on the altar of Christian service: liberal giving, visiting the sick, comforting the bereaved, etc. Dr. Samuel Johnson declared that "patriotism is the last refuge of scoundrels," and it can also be said that the boast of doctrinal soundness is the last refuge of uncharitable, unbenign church members.

Such church members tend to equate their loyalty to Christ to the least demanding phases of His teaching. What demands more of a Christian, sitting in a comfortable church building for worship or getting out of one's easy chair on a cold winter night and traveling some distance to bring comfort, good cheer, and succor to some poor, needy, suffering fellow human being? What demands more of a Christian, abstaining from some unscriptural form of worship or sacrificing of his time, ability, and money to serve others? What demands more of a Christian, prayers offered to God in behalf of the sick, poor, and needy or the backing up of such prayers with the necessary help in alleviating their plight? What demands more of a Christian, giving lip service to the teaching of God's word concerning Christian service or the following through with the actual practice of good works?

It is sad to realize that such formal expressions of religion as worship, Bible reading, prayer, etc. may actually, even though unwittingly or subconsciously, be used as attempts to bribe God so that He will overlook our failure to serve our fellow men. Is this not what the Jews of old tried to do in the sacrifices they offered God? But God would not be bribed! He utterly refused to overlook the callous indifference toward poor, sick, suffering, sorrowing humanity on the part of those who claimed to serve Him. Speaking for Him, the prophet Micah cried out, "Where-with shall I come before Jehovah, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves a year old? will Jehovah be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:6-8).

No matter how important the sacrifices and offerings the Jews made to God as ordained in the law of Moses were, they could never compensate for a life that failed to show humility toward God and kindness and justice toward men. And no matter how important our religious devotions are to God as ordained in the law of Christ, they can never compensate for any of our failures to render Christian service to men. Jesus evidently had this in mind when, quoting Hosea 6:6, He exclaimed, "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice" (Matthew 9:13).

*Any kind of religion, no matter how doctrinally sound it may be, that excludes the practice of good works is pagan—not even remotely Christian.*

It is a sad commentary on the spiritual state of the church when we will immediately mark a man as being unsound in the faith who deviates ever

so slightly in his teaching from what we believe is orthodox, even though his life is devoted to the loving service of sick, sinful, suffering humanity, but will hold in high esteem as being sound in the faith and loyal to Christ some unkind, unfeeling, inconsiderate boor, who has little or no regard for others, just because he is a regular churchgoer and agrees doctrinally with us.

It is significant that the Lord's indictment of the scribes and Pharisees as recorded in the twenty-third chapter of Matthew was not over any lack of orthodoxy in their teaching. Note verses 2 and 3. "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat: all things therefore whatsoever they bid you, these do and observe: but do not ye after their works; for they say, and do not." The doctrine of the scribes and Pharisees was essentially correct, but their practice was widely divergent from their doctrine. The basic wrong in their practice is expressed by the Lord in verses 23 and 24, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye tithe mint and anise and cummin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, justice, and mercy, and faith: but these you ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone. Ye blind guides, that strain out the gnat, and swallow the camel!"

The scrupulosity of these fanatically religious men, whom Jesus called hypocrites, in gathering the tenth sprig of every garden herb, and presenting it to the priest, was not wrong in itself. Indeed, Jesus said, "These ye ought to have done." But what was so tragically wrong was their substitution of the lower for the higher; their failure to follow through with the weightier, more significant teaching of the law, which dealt with correct human relationships—*justice*, giving to all their just dues; *mercy*, acts of benevolence and kindness to the poor, sick, and miserable; *faith*, recognition of the infinite worth of men and confidence in their possibilities for good (cf. Philemon 5).

The phrase "strain out the gnat, and swallow the camel" is a figure of speech known as hyperbole, an exaggeration for the sake of emphasis. Not only does it vividly portray the sheer absurdity and insanity of the inconsistencies in the religious practices of the scribes and Pharisees, but also of every Christian whose religious life can be characterized as majoring in minors and minoring in majors, who fails to practice the weightier matters of the law of Christ in justice, mercy, and faith extended to his fellow men. "See here," said Pasquier Quesnel, "the false tenderness of conscience, which serves only to nourish pride and vanity, and to deceive by an appearance of good. One man is extremely concerned at an omission of a prayer, or of some arbitrary practice which he has imposed on himself, who takes no care to correct his vicious habits of anger, evil speaking, lying, slandering, luxury, or immodesty. Another would not take from his neighbor the value of a gnat or fly, who robs the poor of a sum or heap as big as a camel, by his covetousness or vain expenses."

The rhetorical question Jesus asked of those who were waiting to accuse

him of violating God's law by healing a crippled man on the sabbath emphatically testifies to the emptiness of a religion that excludes doing good to others: "Is it lawful on the sabbath day to do good, or to do harm? to save a life, or to kill?" (Mark 3:4).

Previously, in answer to certain of the Pharisees who had accused His disciples of desecrating the sabbath because they had plucked ears of grain on that day, Jesus said, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath" (Mark 2:27). To the Pharisees, as well as to all others who would reduce religion to mere ritual, the law was virtually all-important, with little importance attached to men. Obedience to the letter of the law was an absolute necessity, even if it excluded serving others. But the Lord insists that man comes first, law second. It was not the law, with its regulations concerning the sabbath, that came first, then man; but man first, then the law for the good of man. It was always proper under the law of Moses to do good at any time, and it is always proper under the law of Christ to do good at any time. Thus any interpretation of divine law that would keep us from doing good is undeniably wrong.

### *The Measure of True Greatness*

The Lord's measure of true greatness in terms of serving others eloquently affirms the great importance of good works in the lives of His followers: "Whosoever would become great among you, shall be your minister; and whosoever would be first among you, shall be servant of all" (Mark 10:43,44). It takes the greatness of good works to make a great Christian. One whose life is devoid of good works is a moral and spiritual pygmy, no matter how doctrinally sound he may be. If we would truly rise to the heights of our possibilities as followers of Christ, to glorify the God who made us, we must abound in good works, in lives that are committed to the service of others.

"Let it be with each of us as a subject of serious inquiry whether our religion will stand the test; whether we are making ourselves the servants of others for their good, after the pattern of Christ, or are spending our labours in self-advancement. To become the servants of all, for their temporal and spiritual welfare, may be accounted worldly folly, but it will be heavenly wisdom. And when the world has passed away and man's final state arrives, our object will not have passed away, but will then be first gained: to reach Him after whom we have been striving, to awake up after His long-sought likeness, and be satisfied" (Henry Alford).

### **Questions**

1. To what does the scope of good works in its broadest sense pertain? What is the emphasis we are giving to good works in this series of lessons?



2. Discuss the proper relationship of God's children to others as the heart of true religion in light of the importance of man in the eyes of Deity.
3. Why does Jesus in His description of the last judgment refer only to the treatment His faithful ones rendered others, mentioning nothing at all about how often they partook of the Lord's supper, etc.?
4. Discuss the Lord's affirmation that the service we render others is service we render Him, and that the service we fail to render others is service we fail to render Him.
5. Why does Jesus refuse to accept our religious devotions when we fail to maintain correct human relationships?
6. Discuss the use of formal religious expressions as a substitute or cover up for our lack of basic goodness in serving others.
7. Why do those who reduce religion to mere ritual equate their loyalty to Christ to the least demanding phases of the teaching of Christ?
8. Discuss the attempt to bribe God by the use of religious ritual.
9. What was the basic wrong in the religious practice of the scribes and Pharisees? Discuss the Lord's use of the phrase "strain out the gnat, and swallow the camel!"
10. What principles are taught by Jesus in Mark 2:27; 3:4?
11. Why is serving others the measure of true greatness?

## DIVINE POWER

In pursuing our study of the teaching of the New Testament concerning good works, we must give due attention to the power of God. It is He that made us, both as human beings and as new creatures in Christ, and it is He that makes possible the powers or dynamics for good works. Before we even consider, then, the blessings involved in good works, the subject matter of the next lesson, it is relevant for us to reverently consider our relationship to Him who is the ultimate source of all good. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning" (James 1:17).

### *Relationship to Salvation*

First, let us note the relationship of good works to the salvation we receive from God. An appropriate passage here is Ephesians 2:4-10, "But God, being rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace have ye been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus: for by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, that no man should glory. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them."

Now that you have read this passage once, read it even more carefully again. You will unforgettably recognize that good works are not the cause of our salvation from sin, but the result of it. Since salvation in Christ is by God's grace, or unmerited favor, and thus a gift He freely bestows on men, it cannot be earned, merited, or deserved by any sinner. All the good works that sinners could ever possibly perform would never remove one iota of the stain of sin from their souls. The merits of the salvation offered by the gospel are entirely through God's greatest gift to the world, His only begotten Son, who paid the price of man's redemption fully and completely at Calvary. See Romans 3:21-4:8. When one trusts in the Sin-offering for salvation, accepting God's free offer of salvation by being baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:26,27), he is saved by God's grace through Christ's merits. Then, on the basis of this wonderful salvation he has received, he is to live a life that is saturated with good works.

This great truth is not only taught in Paul's Ephesian letter but also in his letter to Titus: "For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness

and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that *he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people for his own possession, zealous of good works*" (Titus 2:11-14).

Even the appeal God makes to us for a life of good works or righteousness is based upon the fact of our deliverance from sin: ". . . that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies should serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days" (Luke 1:74,75).

### *God's Workmanship*

After the apostle Paul, in the Ephesian letter, has affirmed our salvation in Christ by God's grace through faith, and not by works, he relates good works to the sublime truth that those who are created in Christ Jesus are God's *workmanship*. This word, translated from the Greek *poiema* (the derivation of our word "poem"), occurs in only one other place in the New Testament, in Romans 1:20, where the apostle uses it with reference to "the things that are made," the physical cosmos or universe. As the physical cosmos is God's doing, His creation, so also is the new creature in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17) God's doing, His creation. Since we who are created in Christ had no works of our own to purchase our salvation, we must recognize that we are nothing but a piece of work of another's doing. God made us. He is the Potter, we are the clay. He put us together, just as a workman puts a machine together, piece by piece, or as a poet creates a poem, word by word, or as a composer creates a song, note by note. Thus we have no more grounds for boasting of what we are as new creatures in Christ than we have for the salvation we received by God's grace.

But the fact that we are God's *workmanship* signifies that God has a purpose concerning us. Just as a piece of machinery is created to perform some function or work, so we are created by God in Christ to perform a particular function, that of good works. Good works are the very end of our new creation in Christ. As men plant orchards to the end that they may produce fruit, so has God planted us in the true vine Jesus Christ that we may bring forth the fruit of good works. Jesus declared, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; and so shall ye be my disciples" (John 15:8). A similar idea is expressed in Colossians 1:10, where Paul prays that his brethren will "walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, *bearing fruit in every good work*, and increasing in the knowledge of God." Fruit-bearing Christians, zealously engaged in doing good works, can well be described as "trees of righteousness, the planting of Jehovah, that he may be glorified" (Isaiah 61:3).

In the statement, "which God afore prepared that we should walk in them," Paul stresses the performance of good works as God's purpose for His workmanship. The rendering of the *New English Bible* is "for which

God designed us." In His plans from the very beginning to save men by the Saviour He would send into the world, God purposed to create or design a people that would walk in good works. The prayer, aim, and plan of every saved person should be that God's purpose for Him will become his purpose. Unquestionably, the victorious Christian life is one that fulfills the plan and purpose God has for His children. Cf. John 15:16.

The fact that God's children are His workmanship, His new creation in Christ Jesus, implies that the dynamics or power for walking in good works come from Him. True, the Christian must utilize his free will and have the proper motivation in submitting himself to the divine will concerning good works, which we shall later discuss at some length in this series of lessons, but it must be insisted upon that the power for good works is not of himself but of God. To fail to accept this conclusion is to court spiritual and moral disaster. How utterly wrong and futile is the idea that a life of good works to the glory of God is realized by the Christian's main strength and awkwardness, with God virtually left out of the picture. The legalistic, and unscriptural, approach to walking in good works is that the rules and regulations God has given us concerning good works are to be applied in our lives by our own strength and power alone. Such an approach stresses the law but rules out the Lawgiver. It is little wonder that it can only mean a prayerless life, a life of dependence on self rather than on God, a life of spiritual emptiness and defeat rather than of spiritual fulness and victory.

The New Testament plainly teaches that the grace of God that saves men from their sins also gives them the power to abound in good works: "And God is able to make all grace abound unto you; that ye, having always all sufficiency in everything, may abound unto every good work: as it is written, He hath scattered abroad, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness abideth for ever. And he that supplieth seed to the sower and bread for food, shall supply and multiply your seed for sowing, and increase the fruits of your righteousness: ye being enriched in everything unto all liberality, which worketh through us thanksgiving to God" (2 Corinthians 9:8-11).

This promise of divine grace to abound unto every good work, of the supplying and multiplying of seed for sowing, is predicated on the basis that *God is able*. Not we, but *God!* If we depend on ourselves alone we are bound to live fruitless lives. But if we depend on God's unlimited power, the inexhaustible treasures of His grace, we will bear abundant fruit in all the good works He has enjoined on us. Even when we are in our weakest and most destitute state, we can depend on the unfailing grace of God to see us through so that our lives will abound in good works. "The everlasting God, Jehovah, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary; there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to him that hath no might

he increaseth strength" (Isaiah 40:28,29).

The power of God to see us through in the doing of good works is also expressed in Philippians 1:6, ". . . he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ." Indeed, the apostle not only attributes the perfection of a good work through God, but also its very inception. Every good work the Christian does, from its very beginning to its very end, is empowered by the grace of God; thus his boast of the good he accomplishes can never be of himself but only of God, so that he can exultantly exclaim, "Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift" (2 Corinthians 9:15).

God's grace as the power for the Christian's doing of good works is further expressed in Philippians 2:13, ". . . it is God who worketh in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure." When we cooperate with divine grace by obeying the injunction of the previous verse, "*work* out your own salvation with fear and trembling," which can only be done as we walk in good works, we have the assurance that we will fulfill the good pleasure of God by His *work* in us. Our *work*, then, is but the outcome of God's *work* or power in us. George Barlow observed, "This sentence removes all merit from the most punctilious diligence, while it effectually takes away the paralyzing fear of failure to which 'workers together with God' need never give place."

As it is in Christ that God's grace saves men from their sins, so it is also in Christ that God's grace gives those that are saved the power to walk in good works. Jesus said, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; so neither can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for apart from me ye can do nothing" (John 15:4,5). One can no more bear fruit to the glory of God without vital connection to Christ than literal fruit can be produced by a branch without vital connection to a vine. The power of fruit bearing is never in the branch but in the vine, and the power of good, God-oriented works is never in the Christian but in the Christ to whom he is vitally connected. Cf. Colossians 3:3.

The sum total of Christian living, a life of good works, can be portrayed as the substitution of the self life for the Christ life; that is, a life that is surrendered, committed, and dedicated to Christ, thus being empowered and controlled by Him. This is the grand and noble thesis of Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me." He who has crucified the old man of sin at the cross, to identify himself without the death of Christ, is made alive to enjoy vital union with Christ and thus to have all-sufficient power to walk in good works. Cf. Romans 6:1-11.

That God's workmanship, Christians, are enabled by virtue of their

new creation in Christ to perform good works is also emphasized in Paul's statement, "I can do all things in him that strengthen me" (Philippians 4:13). All things here truly means *all* things. Through the Lord's unsearchable riches (Ephesians 3:8), there is power to perform every good work. "And my God shall supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). "But thanks be unto God, who always leadeth us in triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest through us the savor of his knowledge in every place" (2 Corinthians 2:14). See Colossians 1:9-11.

Christ's presence, thus His power, in the Christian is realized through the indwelling Spirit. "And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he gave us" (1 John 3:24). The Holy Spirit has appropriately been described as the strengthening and enabling presence of Christ. The validity of this description is affirmed in Ephesians 3:16, 17, ". . . that ye may be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inward man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith . . ." Being "the Spirit of grace" (Hebrews 10:29), the Holy Spirit makes possible the divine grace that gives the Christian all sufficiency for abounding in every good work (2 Corinthians 9:8). To deny, then, the presence of the Spirit in one's life is to deny the presence of divine grace. It is also to deny that one truly belongs to Christ. "But if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Romans 8:9).

### ***Prayer***

Since our good works to the glory of God depend on divine power or grace, it behooves every Christian who would live fruitfully and victoriously to rely on that power by constant prayer. Let him unceasingly pray to God that he may ever abound in good works. In substance, that was the ultimate purpose of Paul's prayer for his fellow Christians in Philippians 1:9-11, and it should be the prayer of every Christian for himself; "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment; so that ye may approve the things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and void of offence unto the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are through Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God."

It is proper that we close this lesson with Ephesians 3:20,21, "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever. Amen."

### **Questions**

1. Discuss the thesis presented in Ephesians 2:4-10 and Titus 2:11-14 that good works are not the cause of our salvation from sin, but the result of it.

2. What is meant by Christians being *God's workmanship*?
3. Discuss the fact that since we are *God's workmanship* He has a purpose concerning us.
4. What does 2 Corinthians 9:8-11 teach concerning the grace of *God*?
5. Discuss the affirmation that *God is able* in relation to the Christian's doing of good works.
6. What is taught concerning the power for good works in Philippians 1:6; 2:13?
7. Discuss the Christian's relationship to Christ in the doing of good works, giving attention to such passages as John 15:4,5; Galatians 2:20; Philippians 4:13-19; Ephesians 3:8.
8. How is Christ's presence, thus His power, realized in the Christian?
9. Why should the Christian who would live fruitfully and victoriously pray unceasingly to *God*?

## Lesson Three

### BLESSINGS

The good works that God has ordained for His children to accomplish are not arbitrarily required of them, not grievous burdens laid on their shoulders to make them miserable and unhappy. As we discussed in the first lesson, everything that God has ordained in His word for His children to do is for their good because of His great love for them.

#### *The Supreme Beatitude*

Now, we can readily understand the benefit of good works to the person for whom they are done. Indeed, the immediate object of such works is to help others, to bring blessings to them. Were there no blessings involved in the things we receive, there would be no basis for gratitude toward those who manifest their concern for our welfare by doing us good. But the truth we desire to stress in this lesson, one which we must accept without reservation, is that there are *greater* blessings in doing good than in being the recipients of good, in giving than in receiving. This great truth is expressly taught in what has been called the *supreme beatitude* of the Bible, incorporated in an utterance of the apostle Paul to the elders of the church in Ephesus: "In all things I gave you an example, that so laboring ye ought to help the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he himself said, *It is more blessed to give than to receive*" (Acts 20:35).

In studying the life of Jesus as recorded in the four gospels, we do not find these exact words uttered by Him. This does not mean, however, that Paul has misrepresented the case; it is obvious that the principle contained in these words was uttered time and time again by the Master, for the prevailing spirit of all His teaching and all His acts expresses the principle of the supreme beatitude.

This beatitude of beatitudes in no way denies that the receiver is blessed, but it simply affirms that the giver is more blessed. The comparative always presupposes the positive. If one were to say that Mary is prettier than Jane, it would be unfair to accuse him of insinuating that Jane is as "ugly as a mud fence." You must have one that is pretty before you can designate one that is prettier. Make no mistake about it, there are blessings involved in receiving, but there are *greater* blessings involved in giving. And the word "giving" in the context of the supreme beatitude, according to Paul's example of laboring to help the weak, pertains to anything we can do to benefit others, whether it be the giving of our time, abilities, energies, or material substance.

In actuality, the Lord teaches in the supreme beatitude that the basis for giving, or good works, is self-interest. At first thought this conclusion may strike us as being unchristian, but when we soberly reflect upon it we will decide that it is entirely Christian and thus entirely correct. The



Lord never teaches man to do or give anything apart from self-concern, self-interest, self-benefit. When the Lord commands sinners to repent and to be baptized, He does so on the basis of the benefit or blessing they will receive, the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). And when He requires that His followers bear fruit in every good work (Colossians 1:10), He does so on the basis of the manifold benefits or blessings they will receive. Cf. Luke 6:38, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they give into your bosom. For with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again."

But we must not confuse self-interest with selfishness; they are diametrically opposed to each other. Selfishness is the inversion of ego, the counterfeit of self-interest, the devil inspired and thus futile attempt to find life's highest joy and happiness by forgetting others, by thinking *only* of oneself. The greedy, selfish person, who does not give of himself and what he has in the service of others, unwittingly works against his own best interests. He is as deluded as the person who would cut his own throat with the intent of improving his health. It is only as we touch other lives with Christian goodness that our own best possibilities can be realized. Thus any course we take that denies others the service we are able to render them is a course of self-maiming or moral and spiritual suicide. Unless or until they become the victims of some deep-reaching perversion or psychosis, human beings naturally do desire to make the best possible of themselves, to actualize their latent possibilities, to enjoy in fact the highest possible good life can offer them. The selfish person has this desire every whit as strongly as the unselfish person, but the course he follows can never lead to its fulfillment.

Why do many who profess to be Christians live selfishly, with little concern for others? Why do they give so little of themselves, of their time, of their material means, in the service of their fellow human beings? The answer is obvious: they really believe that it is more blessed to receive than to give, which simply means that they believe the devil rather than the Lord. In fact, Acts 20:35, the supreme beatitude, is the most disbelieved passage in all the Bible. Yet if you were to read this passage to the most selfish person you know in the church and ask him if he believes it, he would probably answer, "Of course I believe it. It's in the Bible, and I believe every word in the Bible is true." But does he *really* believe it? Surely, if he truly believed it, he would abound in good works, in a life dedicated to the liberal, sacrificial service of others. So, in reality, the life of the selfish church member is a forthright, virtually blasphemous denial of the truthfulness of the Lord's affirmation in the supreme beatitude. It is as if he were standing in the presence of the Saviour and saying, "Jesus, you have said that it is more blessed to give than to receive, but you have lied. I know better, for I believe it is more blessed to receive than to give."

No child of God can possibly live selfishly if he truly realizes that selfishness is self-deceiving, self-defeating, and self-cheating, that the selfish person is a loser and not a winner, who denies himself the best life has to offer.

That it is more blessed to give than to receive is implied by the Lord's words in John 10:10, "The thief cometh not, but that he may steal, and kill, and destroy: I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly." The word "abundantly" in the Greek is *perissos*, meaning "exceeding the usual number or size, above measure, more than average, above the others, uncommon, unusual, extraordinary, remarkable (of that which is usually encountered among men), abundant, profuse, have something in abundance." The life enjoyed by the Christian who abounds in good works is indeed extraordinary, remarkable, and uncommon in comparison to the simple, bare existence of the person who wants to be a recipient of good but not a doer of good. The abundant, full life that Jesus promised His faithful disciples is a life filled with goodness, for it is impossible to have an abundance of life without an abundance of good works. The selfish person who boasts of "living it up," of enjoying life to the very hilt, cannot possibly, even remotely comprehend what it means to *really* live, to live life in all its abundance and fulness. But in answer to the question, "Is life really worth living?," the Christian who abounds in good works can give a resounding, "Yea, verily!"

Any person who believes that the foregoing conclusions concerning the full, abundant life of Christian service are merely academic or theoretical will no longer so believe if he will honestly answer the following question concerning the people he knows best among the Lord's disciples: Who are the happier, the more bouyant of spirit—the givers or the receivers, the doers of good or the recipients of good, those who are concerned only about themselves or those who are concerned about others?

Let us now get down to cases and consider some of the specific blessings that are enjoyed by those who walk in good works.

### ***Christian Character***

There can be no genuine Christian character, which in its very nature is the condition of happiness, peace, and joy, without the doing of good works. The highest state of well-being in this world can never come from circumstances but only from character, not from what one *has* but what one *is*; and, in the final analysis, what one *is* is determined by what one *does*. One cannot *be* good unless he *does* good. This is at least partially the import of James 1:22,25, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves . . . But he that looketh into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and so continueth, being not a hearer that forgetteth but a doer that worketh, this man shall be blessed in his doing."

### ***Deliverance from Self***

When one walks in good works his life is one with a sublimely dominant

purpose: serving God by serving mankind. Worries, anxieties, tensions, and fears tend to disappear with the conception of this great purpose, which is God's purpose concerning us. The happiest of all possible lives in this world is for one to be carried out of the egocentric preoccupation with himself, and the things that cause him to be emotionally disturbed, by the dominant purpose of Christian service, so that he forgets himself in serving others and so enlarges himself. No man can be healthy-minded, enjoying serenity of soul, whose concern is only for himself. If he would get himself off his own hands, he *must* serve others.

The insane asylums are full of egocentric, self-centered people who broke under the pressure of life because they never got themselves off their own hands by giving themselves to others. People who are busily involved in the welfare of others are not prone to go off the deep end and lose contact with reality.

### *The Best from Others*

It is only as we walk in good works, serving our fellow men, that we can receive the best that others are able to give: friendship, sympathy, understanding, kindness, etc.—all of which can contribute to the fulness of life Jesus promises those who follow him. It is axiomatic that we reap as we sow. Thus it is only as we sow good works that we can reap the great blessings involved in the best to be received from others.

### *Partaking of the Divine Nature*

No one can be blessed in partaking of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4), to become like God, who does not walk in good works. "To depend upon another, and to receive from him, is the necessary imperfection of creatures; but to confer benefits is to resemble God" (John Tillotson). Aristotle said that "by narrowness and selfishness, by envy and ill-will, men degenerate into beasts, and become wolves and tigers to one another; but by goodness and kindness, by mutual compassion and helpfulness, men become gods one to another." Cicero said, "Men resemble the gods in nothing so much as doing good to their fellow-creatures." God is the giver of every good and perfect gift, the supreme Benefactor of mankind, and thus no man can be godlike, to enjoy the blessedness of communion with Him, who fails to liberally and sacrificially give of himself and what he has in the service of others. The entire earthly mission of our Lord was devoted to the service of mankind (Matthew 20:28; 2 Corinthians 8:9). How, then, can any person be Christlike who fails to serve others?

### *Eternal Life*

The ultimate blessing to be received by those who walk in good works is eternal life. Indeed, the present blessings connected with good works are but a foretaste of divine glory in the world to come, of the perfect, never ending blessedness of heaven. It is true that no person can earn or

deserve eternal salvation. But it is also true that our only access to the grace of God and the merits of Christ which make this salvation possible is faith, which can only be maintained by a life that abounds in good works. See 1 Peter 1:9; James 2:14-26.

In the first lesson we briefly referred to the judgment scene as described in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, noting its implication concerning good works as the heart of true religion. But we also learn from this description that what men receive in the judgment is determined by the way they treat others: "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me . . . Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on his left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry, and ye did not give me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not . . . Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these least, ye did it not unto me. And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life" (verses 34-36; 40-43; 45,46). Nothing could be plainer than this, and every child of God should receive the message and receive it well: it is either abounding in good works and the unending bliss of heaven or lacking in good works and the unending misery of hell.

Some other passages which connect one's eternal destiny with his works are: "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds" (Matthew 16:27); "For we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10); ". . . whatsoever good thing each one doeth, the same shall he receive again from the Lord, whether he be bond or free" (Ephesians 6:8).

### Questions

1. How do we know that Jesus taught the supreme beatitude during His earthly ministry, even though the exact words attributed to him by Paul are not found in the four gospels?
2. Does the supreme beatitude affirm that there are no blessings involved in receiving? Discuss.
3. Why is self-interest the basis for giving, or good works?
4. What is the difference between self-interest and selfishness?

5. Why do so many who profess to be Christians live selfishly, with little concern for others?
6. Why is the abundant life mentioned in John 10:10 a life that is filled with good works?
7. Discuss Christian character as one of the blessings involved in good works.
8. Why can no man whose concern is only for himself be healthy-minded, enjoying serenity of soul?
9. What are some of the blessings we can receive from others when we render them Christian service?
10. Discuss partaking of the divine nature as one of the blessings involved in good works.
11. Discuss eternal life as the ultimate blessing to be received by those who walk in good works.

## MOTIVATION (1)

The power for good works, as we discussed in the second lesson, comes from God. No one, however, can walk in good works to the praise and glory of God who does not utilize this power by faith. Cf. Mark 9:23; Galatians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 15:57; 1 John 5:4. But faith is of no avail, having no access at all to divine power, unless it is motivated. The word "motive" is defined by Webster as "that within the individual, rather than without, which incites him to action; any idea, need, emotion, or organic state that prompts to action." What, then, is it in the Christian that incites him to good works, that causes his faith to be the channel of God's power or grace?

### *Expectation of Divine Judgment*

Although it is not the highest motive, the realization that he must face God in the judgment is not without significance in inciting the Christian to good works. Indeed, God, as He has revealed in the New Testament, would have every Christian soberly realize the reality of death, the inevitability of the second coming of Christ, and the certainty of a last judgment where he shall give account of his life to God. No one can seriously, reverently read the description of the judgment in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew without receiving some motivation to walk in good works. In fact, it is quite obvious that that is the principal reason why this description has been recorded in the New Testament.

And when any Christian seriously, reverently reads the following passages, he will be further motivated to do more for Christ by doing more for others: "So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12); "For we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10); "And inasmuch as it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment" (Hebrews 9:27); "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness?" (2 Peter 3:10,11); "And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne; and books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Revelation 20:12). See Ecclesiastes 12:13,14; Acts 17:30,31; Romans 14:10.

Harry Liddon has offered the following sober reflection on the reali-

zation of impending judgment as a motivating force in the Christian life: "The next motive [after love] in the order of efficiency is, beyond all doubt, the remembrance of the inevitable last account which we must each of us give before the judgment-seat of Christ. St. Augustine says, 'Nothing has contributed more powerfully to wean me from all that held me down to earth than the thought constantly dwelt on of death and of the last account.' This resolution to give thought to the last account would prove a useful stimulus. It is like the old Jewish law—it is a schoolmaster to bring the soul to the feet of Jesus Christ; for the thought of that account does force us to think over our lives—not once or twice, but often—not superficially, but with a determination to see ourselves as we are. To think of ourselves thus is to anticipate its results as far as we are concerned. It is to act on St. Paul's advice—that if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged."

### *Desire to Escape Condemnation*

The certainty of hell as the eternal abiding place of those who fail to walk in good works is plainly revealed in the Lord's sentence passed on all such at the last judgment: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire, which is prepared for the devil and his angels . . . And these shall go away into eternal punishment" (Matthew 25:41,26). See Matthew 8:12; Revelation 20:10. John 5:28,29 records Jesus as saying, "Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and *they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment.*" The word "judgment" here is synonymous with condemnation. See Acts 24:15.

Now, it is obvious that if the desire to avoid hell has no place at all in motivating the Christian to good works, such warnings as the foregoing are meaningless and futile. But when any Christian soberly reflects on these divine warnings concerning the certain doom that awaits the ungodly, he will give serious attention to his spiritual and moral condition and to his need of a life of faith that manifests itself in good works. Then as he looks to God for security against eternal condemnation, he will ponder the riches of His love and grace, to respond in the highest motive of all for good works, *love*.

But it must be insisted upon here that although the desire to avoid hell has its place in motivating the Christian to good works, it can only be elemental. If it is the only motive, it can never incite the Christian to any more than cursory attention to good works, with as little done as he feels he can conveniently get by with. One so motivated is, in actuality, using his good works as a means of appeasing the divine wrath against sin, as if he were saying to God, "When you look at the good I've done, you will surely overlook my sins and not allow me to go to hell." But as God will not be bribed by ritual to overlook one's failure to walk in

good works, neither will he be bribed by good works to overlook one's failure to be genuinely and lovingly committed to Christ and His cause.

### ***Desire to Go to Heaven***

In our lesson on the blessings involved in good works, we briefly discussed heaven as the consummation of a life that abounds in good works. It is in order here to stress that the desire to go to heaven is a dynamic force in motivating the Christian to live such a life. This motive is not selfishness but self-interest, based upon the realization that one cannot receive the end of faith in the eternal salvation of his soul unless his faith issues in the service of others.

But certain cynics accuse the Christian of doing good only because he desires to get paid off by God with the bliss of heaven, with the hope of "eating pie in the sky by and by." Admittedly, if the Christian's only motive for doing good is the desire to go to heaven, it is without God's approval. And it is certainly true that no one can buy his way to heaven. But to condemn this motive per se is entirely unjustifiable, for any Christian who loses sight of heaven, who has little or no desire to inherit the perfect bliss of heaven, cannot possibly enjoy to the fullest the happiness in this present life that is inherent in good works. Furthermore, where there is no desire to go to heaven, one will have little or no motivation to be patient in doing good when the going is rough and he is beset by the temptation to forget others and think only of himself. No one will obey the following injunction who is not seriously intent on going to heaven: "And let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9). See 1 Corinthians 15:58.

If any Christian holds fast to his resolve to continue steadfastly in good works, he will continually keep his mind on the things above, where Christ is (Colossians 3:1,2). As C. M. Merry aptly expressed it, "A Christian will not be weary of service, that hath the crown in his eye." Someone else has said, "Our heavenly harvest lies in every earnest and faithful deed, as the oak with centuries of growth and all its summer glory sleeps in the acorn-cup, as the golden harvest slumbers in the seeds under their covering of wintry snow."

Yea, verily, the road to heaven, which is the way of dependence on Christ, is paved with good works!

### ***Gratitude***

The Christian is also motivated to walk in good works when he is truly grateful for the blessings he has received from God. In feeling deep gratitude toward God, David could not keep from propounding the question, "What shall I render unto Jehovah for all his benefits towards me?" (Psalms 116:12). And the Christian who is gratefully aware of the manifold blessings he has received from the unstinting, bountiful hand of God is also deeply concerned about what he can render unto his great



Benefactor, for it is axiomatic that men desire to serve and to please those to whom they are grateful for blessings received.

Not only do grateful Christians thank God for His blessings in their prayers to Him, but they also thank Him by walking in good works. Being grateful for the wonderful good He has done them, they are motivated to please Him by doing good to their fellow men. Jesus was ostensibly appealing to His disciples' sense of gratitude when He commanded them, "Freely ye received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8).

We have made a great mistake in limiting the meaning of worship to the praise we render God with our lips and to the activities we engage in during religious services. Thanksgiving in the verbal praise we offer God is insincere and thus futile unless it is combined with the praise we are to offer Him in the good we do others. One cannot reverently, sincerely be motivated by gratitude to praise God in a religious service or in his private prayers unless he is also motivated by gratitude to praise Him by walking in good works. In this light, carefully consider Hebrews 13:16, "But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." This passage affirms that all the service we render others, described as the doing of good and communicating, is actually worship of God, sacrifices we offer Him. Whenever, then, any Christian is motivated by gratitude to do good unto others, it is as if he were placing on an altar before God a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to Him from whom all blessings flow.

In looking at the matter negatively, we can even better understand the power of gratitude in motivating the Christian to good works. After the apostle Peter had exhorted his brethren to supply in their faith the Christian graces, which cannot be separated from a life of good works, he declared, "For he that lacketh these things is blind, seeing only what is near, having forgotten the cleansing from his old sins" (2 Peter 1:9). It is evident that one who does not walk in good works has forgotten the cleansing from his old sins, for the receiving of this great gift of God simultaneously makes him God's "workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Ephesians 2:10). How can any person possibly remember the salvation or spiritual cleansing he has received from God when he has forgotten the very purpose of that salvation, the walking in good works? Furthermore, it is plainly evident that he who fails to walk in good works, who has thus forgotten the cleansing from his old sins, is ungrateful for this wonderful gift of God; for, surely, no truly grateful person can ever forget the unspeakable gift of divine love in the spiritual cleansing he has received from God.

The Christian who does not walk in good works is not only ungrateful to God, who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, but also to the Saviour, who willingly submitted Himself to His Father's will in suffering the ignominious, painful death of the cross in order to make possible the salvation of all men. No Christian can stand at the foot of

the cross, looking up into the agonized face of the suffering Saviour with a heart filled with gratitude for such an untold sacrifice, and fail to be motivated to go out into the world to serve those for whom Christ also suffered and died.

### **Love**

It is difficult to distinguish between love and gratitude, and many believe that they are virtually one and the same. However, in this discussion we shall consider love separately as a motivating force for good works, assuming that it is the inevitable outgrowth of gratitude. There can hardly be any argument against the conclusion that when one gratefully contemplates the loving kindness and goodness of God, his heart will overflow with love for his divine Benefactor. The divine word declares, "We love, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Our love for God is but the grateful response to His love for us, which He manifested in His abundant goodness toward us, especially in the giving of His only begotten Son to redeem us from our sins (John 3:16).

And it is in love that we find the highest motivation for good works, the lack of which no work can rightly be called *good*. Someone has said, "The strongest of all motives that can change a man's life, both within and without, for his lasting good, is the love of God. If we could love God sincerely for twenty-four hours we should be other men capable, spiritually speaking, almost of anything."

Genuine love of God cannot exist without it overflowing and spending itself in good works. It is true that there can be a kind of service rendered to others without love, which we shall later discuss; but it is impossible for one to genuinely love without doing good to others. This is the plain import of 1 John 3:17, "But whoso hath the world's goods and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him?" This question is purely rhetorical. Where there are no good works there is no love of God. In the next verse John exhorts, "My little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth." All the sentimental, eloquent utterances one may make concerning his love of God are patently false unless they are made real in good works. In fact, walking in good works as the new creation of God in Christ Jesus is virtually synonymous with walking in love, to imitate the God of all goodness and all love: "Be ye therefore imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, even as Christ also loved you, and gave himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for an odor of a sweet smell" (Ephesians 5:1,2).

Paul declared, "The love of Christ constraineth us" (2 Corinthians 5:14). The basic idea here may be Christ's love for us, but His love for us must find a response in our love for Him before it can incite us to good works. He loved us so much that He died for us; and we, in response to His love, must love Him so much that we will willingly present our bodies, our time, our money, our all as sacrifices on the altar of Christian

service. In love He gave His life for us, and in love we give our lives to Him.

### Questions

1. Why must faith be motivated to have access to divine power for good works?
2. Discuss the expectation of divine judgment as a motive for good works.
3. Discuss the desire to escape condemnation as a motive for good works?
4. Even though one cannot buy his way to eternal bliss, why is the desire to go to heaven a proper motive for good works?
5. Why cannot the Christian reverently, seriously be motivated by gratitude to praise God in a religious service or in his private prayers unless he is also motivated by gratitude to praise Him by walking in good works?
6. Why is it evident that one who does not walk in good works is ungrateful to God for the cleansing from his old sins?
7. Why is walking in good works virtually synonymous with walking in love?
8. What is meant by Paul's declaration, "The love of Christ constraineth us"?

## MOTIVATION (2)

In continuing our discussion of love as the greatest force in motivating the Christian to good works, we first notice Galatians 5:6, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith working through love." Faith is indeed the Christian's access to the power of God for good works, as we noticed in the preceding lesson; but this passage insists that it cannot avail without love. Faith is powerless to perform good works by the grace of God and to His glory unless it is motivated by love. Thus the Christian is exhorted, "Let all that ye do be done in love" (1 Corinthians 16:14); "And above all things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness" (Colossians 3:14). Cf. James 2:22.

### *Love of Men*

But love as the greatest force in motivating the Christian to good works is not limited to our relationship with God; it must also include our relationship with men. In fact, it is impossible to truly love God without loving those whom God has made in His own image and for whom Christ suffered and died. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen" (1 John 4:20). Strong language, this! Whoever prates about his love for God, but does not love others, is a liar. Underscore that word, *liar*! And the impending doom of all liars is clearly set forth in Revelation 21:8, ". . . all liars, their part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death." Cf. 1 John 3:14, 15.

Indeed, 1 John 4:7,8 makes it plain that one who does not love others does not really know God and thus is not a genuine child of God: "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." Such a person abides in spiritual darkness: "He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is no occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in the darkness, and walketh in the darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because the darkness hath blinded his eyes" (1 John 2:9-11).

We can readily understand the great power of love in motivating the Christian to good works when we realize that loving is *caring*. When we truly *care* for some one, we want to do him only good, never evil. Thus to love our fellow men is, in a very real sense, the *only* divinely ordained responsibility we have to them. As Paul expressed it, "Owe no man anything, save to love one another: for he that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not

kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not covet, and if there be any other commandment, it is summed up in this word, namely, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: love therefore is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:8-10). Augustine observed that "love is a debt which is multiplied by paying." The debt of love can never be discharged, for as long as we love a person there will never be an end to the good we will do him.

"Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. *Love never faileth.*" (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

Can we not see the absurdity, even insanity, of the legalistic appeal for good works that stresses obedience to law but not the love that is to motivate that obedience? Such an appeal stresses what *ought to* or *must* be done in obedience to law. Any one who responds to this appeal will do good only as a matter of cold duty in obedience to the letter of the law, reluctantly and unenthusiastically, doing just as little as he can to ease his conscience. But love-motivated good works are not done merely on the basis of what one *ought to* or *must* do, but on the basis of what one *wants* to do. Thus the duty of good works as ordained by divine law becomes the loving Christian's joy and pleasure—glorious, happy privilege! Instead of doing as little as he can to serve others, he does as much as he can, being powerfully motivated to zeal and enthusiasm in his good works.

The love that is godlike has as its object *all* men, whether friend or foe, rich or poor, black or white, etc.; thus it motivates the Christian to serve *all* men. "But I say unto you that hear, Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you . . . And if ye love them that love you, what thank have ye? for even sinners love those that love them. And if ye do good to them that do good to you, what thank have ye? for even sinners do the same" (Luke 6:27,28,32,33); "But if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him to drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:20,21); "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we also do toward you" (1 Thessalonians 3:12); "See that none render unto any one evil for evil; but always follow after that which is good, one toward another, and toward all" (1 Thessalonians 5:15). See Matthew 5:43-48.

The import of Galatians 6:10 is that the loving Christian takes advantage of *every* opportunity to serve *all* men: "So then, as we have opportunity, let us work that which is good toward all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of faith." True, the Christian's

good works are to begin with the household of faith, the church, which has the first claim on his concern for others. It is misguided zeal that would cause any Christian to overlook the needs of his brothers and sisters in Christ, confining his good works to those of the world, just as it would be wrong for a man to overlook the needs of his wife and children in his zeal to help those outside his family. Cf. 1 Timothy 5:8. The Russian novelist Tolstoy became a fanatic in his zeal to help the down-trodden and outcasts of society, but for years he hardly lifted a little finger to help his own wife.

But it is also misguided zeal that would cause any Christian to limit his service of others to the family of God. *All* men are to be the recipients of our good works. We must therefore recognize the selfishness of a love that would only serve those outside the household of faith who are of our own race. Of late there has been a great deal of soul searching on the part of many Christians of every race, with the consequent recognition that the hatred and contempt they have had for those with a different color of skin is a shameful denial of the inherent, infinite worth of every human being. God hasten the day when the Lord's church everywhere will be a bulwark of strength and decency against every form and facet of racial prejudice and hate.

We must also recognize the lack of love many Christians have for those of their own race who are on a lower economic and social level than they or who have been especially brutalized and degraded by sin. Carefully read James 2:1-9. In truth, the church's respectability is one of the greatest threats to its spirituality. Just to be honest, no matter how piously we may prate about our responsibility to do good unto all men, the twentieth century church has principally identified itself with those of the middle class, taking pride in being acceptable to the "nice" people of our society, and has failed, with the exception of a few isolated cases, to establish contact with those of the lower classes. What about the dregs of society: the winos, the unwashed, the harlots, the dope addicts, the thieves, etc.? Surely, God considers them of infinite worth, *but do we?* Can we honestly say that we are converted to Christ and thus truly concerned for those for whom He is concerned when we refuse to contaminate our respectable selves by coming in loving, ministering contact with the offscourings of society?

A lesson we who claim to follow Christ must learn, and learn well, if we would truly walk in good works as the new creation of God, is that we can never fulfill our God-given responsibility to do good unto *all* men unless we truly love *all* men, unless we can look at any and every human being with a loving heart and honestly say, "Precious in the sight of God, precious also in my sight." James Hastings wrote, "The face of every man and woman and little child we pass on the street—sin-scarred or careworn or tear-stained—must be to us the very face of Christ. Behind that marred countenance, under that brutalized, besotted husk, lies hidden

a beautiful brother, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. Dare we think cheaply and contemptuously of the vilest man whom Christ loves, for whom Christ died? Since he is not ashamed to call them brethren, for His sake they are sacred and dear. The touch of His nature, the blood of His sacrifice, make the whole world kin.”

### *Proper Love of Self*

In considering love as the greatest motivating force for good works, we must not overlook the truism that the proper love of self precedes the proper love of others, that, in fact, one cannot properly love others and thus do them good unless he properly loves himself and thus does himself good. That is the import of the commandment given to every Christian: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Romans 13:9). How can one possibly love his neighbor as himself unless he first loves himself? There are those, however, who grow quite indignant with this view. They argue that self-love is evil and that the true objective of the Christian life is a complete renunciation of self in the altruistic service of others. But such an argument flies in the face of the clear commandment of God. It is not love of self that is wrong per se; but only the counterfeit of such love: the narcissistic attitude toward self that is egocentric, idolatrous, and self-destroying. A self-love, however, that recognizes and has respect for one’s worth as a human being, that seeks to do for oneself what will contribute to his highest good, is the love the Christian must have for himself if he would truly love and serve others. He who does not possess this love, who, in fact, inadvertently hates himself, who, in spite of his shortcomings, does not have a proper regard for himself as a human being made in the image of God, can have no real regard and respect for others. His contempt for others is actually a projection of contempt for himself, for in others he sees his own marred image.

The truly converted Christian does not “think of himself more highly than he ought to think” (Romans 12:3), but he does enjoy a wholesome self-respect, even though he does some stumbling along the way (James 3:2), that comes from a life dedicated to God and His righteousness. He has a sense of personal worth as one made in the image of God and thus beloved of Him; he therefore sees in every other person, regardless of his race, nationality, economic and social standing, etc., the same image of God and thus the same preciousness in His sight. Consequently, the love he has for them, which seeks their good, is but a projection of the love he has for himself, which seeks his good.

### *Divine Origin of Love*

We must not overlook the appeal Christ makes for His disciples to love others, thus to render them sacrificial service, in John 15:12,13, “This is my commandment, that ye love one another, even as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his

friends." The love we show others in the sacrifices we make for them of our time, money, abilities, etc. is not only a projection of the love we have for ourselves but also of the love that Christ has for us, who gave the last measure of devotion in laying down His life for us. Can we not see, then, that all love is ultimately of divine origin, that this greatest of all motivating forces for good in the world originates with God, and that therefore to Him goes all the praise and glory for the love that sweetens our lives and overflows in blessings it brings to others? Truly, "love is of God" (1 John 4:7). Truly, "we love, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

### ***Loving Giving***

He who seeks the higher blessedness inherent in giving rather than in receiving will utterly fail in his goal unless his giving is motivated by love. "And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it *profiteth me nothing*" (1 Corinthians 13:3). *A loveless life is a profitless life.* All the gestures of good that we could ever possibly extend to others without love would leave us as spiritually empty and impoverished as if we had done absolutely nothing in the service of mankind. If we would walk in good works as those who are the Lord's new creation, created in Him for good works, we must walk in love. It is indeed "more blessed to give than to receive," but only as our giving is motivated by love.

### **Questions**

1. How does faith avail in Christ Jesus as the access to divine power for good works?
2. What does John affirm concerning the person who says he loves God but does not love men?
3. Why is love the *only* divinely-ordained obligation we have to men?
4. Discuss the appeal that legalism makes for good works. What is the appeal made for good works by love?
5. Discuss the love for *all* men that motivates the Christian to serve *all* men, giving attention to the following passages: Luke 6:27,28,32,33; Romans 12:20,21; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 5:15.
6. Why are the Christian's good works to be done *especially* for those of the household of faith, according to Galatians 6:10?
7. Discuss the failure of Christians to love and thus serve those of other races.
8. Discuss the failure of Christians to love and thus serve those who are of the lower classes.



9. Why is it so necessary for a Christian to love himself properly if he would truly love and serve others?
10. Discuss the divine origin of love.
11. Discuss the proposition that he who seeks the higher blessedness inherent in giving rather than in receiving will utterly fail in his goal unless his giving is motivated by love.

## MOTIVATION (3)

Although no work can truly be *good*, of benefit to the doer as well as to the recipient, without the motivation of love, there are works which can accommodatively be called "good," which render service to others, that are not motivated by love. God's estimate of "good works," let it be remembered, is *qualitative* as well as *quantitative*. True, He is glorified when His children bear much fruit (John 15:8), but only as that fruit is permeated with the quality of love. Consequently, we who are Christians need to carefully examine the motives that prompt us to serve others to see if, above all, they include love for God and men. And especially we need to be alert to the possibility that we will rationalize our wrong motives, for all of us human beings tend to subconsciously avoid admitting anything about our motives that would lower our self-esteem; thus we can see in our motives for good works a love for God and men that does not really exist. And by rationalizing our wrong motives, we can go through life lulled into a sense of false security, believing that we are acceptable to God.

As we consider some of the wrong motives that can prompt the Christian to serve others, let us honestly, with the help of God in prayer, examine ourselves to see if any of these motives are present in us.

### *Mere Weakness Which Cannot Say No*

There are those who comply to certain requests to render service to others, to visit the sick, give money and goods to the poor, etc., who have no feeling of mercy, sympathy, or compassion toward the recipients of their service, but who are so weak-willed that they cannot even be true to their actual feelings, wrong as they are, and say no. If they were to say no, they would have to go through the contortions of explaining themselves; and so they take what they feel is the easier way out by complying with what they are asked to do.

### *Desire to Get Rid of What Is No Longer Desirable*

There was more than a child's whim in the definition, "charity is giving poor folks old stuff you can't use yourself." There are those who seldom ever give up anything of value to themselves in order to help others, virtually limiting their charitable expressions to cast-off clothes or other unwanted objects. They feel quite charitably disposed, commending themselves for helping others; but love has nothing to do with it. Love cannot exist where the willingness to sacrifice does not exist, and those who will only serve others when they do not have to give up anything that is desirable to themselves are loveless, unchristlike people.

## *Desire to Avoid the Painful Sight of Suffering and Want*

There are those who cannot live with themselves, to be constantly accused by their conscience, unless they feel that they are doing something to serve humanity; but they cringe at the thought of coming into contact with the actual sight of suffering, sorrowing, impoverished human beings. They may have developed a sentimental attitude toward mankind in the abstract, but they do not really love men in the concrete, the individuals who compose mankind. So the good they do others is limited to the check they mail to some charitable cause or to the money they drop in the contribution basket Sunday morning. By so doing, they ease their conscience and feel that they are serving the cause of Christ. But if they truly loved *persons*, actual flesh-and-blood human beings, with the love that bears and endures all things, they would seek to go into the haunts of sin, suffering, sorrow, and want, to become personally involved in the lives of men, not only to give of their material means but also of themselves in the service of others.

## *Fear of Criticism*

There are those who are motivated to serve others by the fear that the failure to do so will leave them vulnerable to criticism. It is not so much that they have the kind of pride which seeks praise for their good works, but simply that their self-esteem cannot brook criticism. So rather than being accused of selfishness and unlovingness, or of being out of step with others around them who are doing good, they reluctantly and joylessly render some service to their fellow men, but only as little as they can conveniently get by with. How different their attitude is from that which Paul advocated when he requested that Philemon accept Onesimus back in his household because he would want to do so, not merely because of any criticism he might receive from Paul if he refused to do so: "But without thy mind I would do nothing; that thy goodness should not be as of necessity, but of free will" (Philemon 14).

## *Fear of God*

The fear contemplated here is not reverential respect born of love, but a dread of God that thinks of Him as a cruel tyrant whose wrath can only be appeased by works of human merit. Those who so fear God do not want to go to heaven; they are just fearful of going to hell. So they go through the drudgery and joylessness of a modicum of good works with the hope that they can escape the wrath of the unlovely and unloving deity they call God.

## *Self-glory*

The desire for self-glory or self-exaltation, to receive the praise of men, is probably the most powerful of all wrong motives for good works. When

a person is so egocentric that nothing is more captivating to him than praise from his fellow men, he will rise and shine in the service of others, often with great liberality. In fact, such liberality is used to buy praise, just as a man uses money to buy a commodity.

And how difficult it is for any person who is so motivated to admit to himself that he is a show-off, whose only desire in the good he does is self-exaltation. And how easy it is for him to beguile himself into believing that it is because of genuine concern for others that he serves them. Such a person has not learned to love himself properly; thus unable to love others, he cannot serve them by the proper motivation. Compensating for a deep-seated feeling of inferiority or personal insufficiency, he has developed an exaggerated sense of self-importance which must constantly be fed by flattery and praise.

Jesus well knew how man's pride would make him vulnerable to the temptation to do good with the desire to receive the praise of others when He warned, "Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them: else ye have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. When therefore thou doest alms, sound not a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have received their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father who seeth in secret shall recompense thee" (Matthew 6:1-4).

During the time of Christ it was the custom for great personages—princes, governors, and such like—when making a grand procession through some favored province, to have a trumpet sounded before them and to scatter gold and silver, thus to gain the good will of their subjects. Jesus likens the almsgiving of the hypocrites to this kind of lordly display of liberality. Their alms were never distributed without their taking good care, in whatever way they could, to let the deed be known so that they might receive the praise of men. Cf. Matthew 23:5.

The phrase "let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" is a proverbial expression, implying that our good works are not to be done ostentatiously so that we deliberately call the attention of others to them. In other words, while one hand is engaged in a good work, we must not beckon men's attention to it with the other hand.

We must not conclude, however, from the foregoing exhortation of Jesus that He advocates secrecy per se in the doing of good, which, if it were His intent, would plainly contradict His teaching in Matthew 5:14-16, "Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a lamp, and put it under a bushel, but on the stand; and it shineth unto all that are in the house. Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

If the Lord's disciples were to deliberately hide their good works, to

go out of their way to keep men from seeing them, they could never influence others to glorify God. Thus it is a false modesty that would cause any Christian to hide his good works for fear that he might be accused of seeking the praise of men. What Jesus obviously has in mind in the use of the phrase "that thine alms be in secret" is the avoidance of all ostentation and display in good works, in which the motive is seeking the praise of men. Consequently, He commands His disciples, "Let [not make] your light shine before men." One who *makes* his light shine would deliberately call the attention of others to his good works. But one who *lets* his light shine is simply engaging in good works because of his love for God and men without either trying to hide them from a false sense of modesty on the one hand or trying to display them from an egotistical desire for praise on the other hand.

So we can see that it was not the publicity of the conduct of the hypocrites in itself which Jesus condemned, but the ungodly motive which led to that publicity. And in this connection it is necessary to bear in mind that the mere fact the good works of a fellow Christian are out in the open does not in itself mean that his motive is wrong, that he is seeking the praise of men. We must not be guilty of judging in such matters. The genuinely loving, compassionate, and liberal man is often put out into the front, and obtains a prominence from which he would rather gladly avoid if it were possible; but he gets this position, not with the view of exalting himself, but in order that his example may stimulate and encourage others to good works. We would be less prone to judge the motives of others in their good works if we recognized the difficulty in reconciling these two things: to avoid all ostentation, and yet at the same time to get all the advantage of generous Christian example.

In examining our personal motives for engaging in good works, we must not carry self-scrutiny too far. We can be too hard on ourselves, engaging in a morbid introspection that can only result in the pains of an offended conscience which are entirely unwarranted. We must recognize our inner imperfections as well as our imperfections of action. If any Christian were to love exactly as God loves, then he would be entirely free from all show and display in his good works. But since no Christian loves to this degree, his motives for doing good are not entirely unmixed; along the way he will do some good with the desire to receive the praise of men. God's grace can accept us even though there is dross in our motives, just as it can accept us even though there is dross in our actions. But we must examine our motives to be sure that they *essentially* involve love for God and men, and that we are continually striving by God's grace to remove every semblance of ostentation and display from our good works.

Suppose we make the following test: Do we *only* do good when we know that we will receive praise from men? Suppose there is a call for the expenditure of our time, abilities, or money in the service of others

that will bring us no praise at all—perhaps even ridicule and criticism from some. What would your answer be to such a call? The person who essentially loves God and men, who essentially seeks the good of others, unquestionably knows what his answer would be.

Jesus tells us in plain words that those who are motivated by the desire to receive praise from men in their doing of good works will have no heavenly reward, that since the only reward they seek is earthly, it is the only reward they will receive (Matthew 6:1,2). They do nothing with an eye to His glory, and from Him they can expect no reward. M. G. Pearse observed, "Our Lord bids us beware of what we may call a natural religious life—a religious life that is born of self and sustained of self, that has no higher source and no other aim. It pays and gives alms and fasts; but all that is only the price it pays for the good opinions of others. It gives its gold to buy men's admiration, and has it; that is its reward. Very different, in all its course, is the life of holiness. It is born of God; we can only receive this life from Him, and we can only retain it by continually receiving—of Him, for Him, to Him in its ceaseless round."

### *Conclusion*

We have already emphasized in this series of lessons the importance of good works in the life of faith that leads to heaven. But the Lord would have us see that all the good works in the world which are improperly motivated are hell-oriented, not heaven-oriented. He declared, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). Those who poison the fountain of life, the heart, by filling it with unholy, unchristlike motives can never see God. They do not see Him now by the eye of faith, and they will not see Him in that realm where faith shall change into sight. These sobering, disquieting realizations should cause every Christian to strive prayerfully, seeking the grace of God, to remove from his heart every impure motive so that his walk in good works will always be Christ-empowered, Christ-pleasing, and heaven-oriented.

### *Questions*

1. Why do we need to be alert to the possibility that we will rationalize our wrong motives?
2. Discuss the motive of mere weakness that cannot say no which prompts the Christian to serve others.
3. What is wrong with the motive that prompts the Christian to give only those things to others that he no longer wants himself?
4. Discuss the motivation of those who limit the service they render others to the check they mail to some charitable cause or to the money they drop in the contribution basket Sunday morning.

5. Discuss the fear of criticism as a motive for good works.
6. What is the wrong kind of fear of God that motivates the Christian to good works?
7. Why is self-glory probably the most powerful of all wrong motives for good works?
8. Discuss the warning that Jesus gives in Matthew 6:1-4.
9. What is the harmony between the Lord's teaching in Matthew 6:1-4 and in Matthew 5:14-16?
10. Why must we not carry self-scrutiny too far in examining our personal motives for engaging in good works?
11. Are you willing to serve others when you know that you will receive no praise at all?
12. Why are wrong motives for doing good not heaven-oriented?

## Lesson Seven

### SCOPE (1)

The good works that Christians are to engage in have no bounds set to them; they are unlimited in scope. As we previously noted, the beneficiaries of our good works are *all* men (Galatians 6:10), and now we stress that Christians are to engage in *all* good works, that there are absolutely no limits to the good they are to accomplish. In Paul's prayer for the Colossian saints, he expressed the desire that they would "walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work . . ." (Colossians 1:10). This passage evidently implies that no Christian can please the Lord unless he strives, as he has the opportunity, to do all the good he can in the service of others.

In 2 Timothy 2:21 the apostle states that the Christian is to be "a vessel of honor, sanctified, meet for the master's use, *prepared unto every good work.*" How different the holy, sanctified Christian is, whose fitness for the Lord's use has prepared him unto every good work, from those described in Titus 1:16, "They profess that they know God; but by their works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto *every good work reprobate.*"

Titus 3:1 speaks of the alertness the Christian is to have concerning every opportunity for doing good: "Put them in mind to be in subjection to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready unto every good work."

In 2 Corinthians 9:8 the inspired writer refers to the grace of God as the power for every good work: "And God is able to make all grace abound unto you; that ye, having always all sufficiency in everything, may abound unto every good work." Substantially the same idea is presented in 2 Thessalonians 2:16,17, "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word."

We cannot, however, obey the Lord's will by bearing fruit in every good work, to do good unto all men as we have the opportunity, unless we clearly understand the nature and meaning of good works. Some unknown writer has defined "good works" as "whatever may tend to promote the good and happiness of our neighbor; to prevent any peril or misfortune he may be exposed to, or to deliver him out of any circumstances of adversity which he may be in." In principle, this definition is in harmony with God's Word. Anything that the Christian does that truly benefits another, that meets his real needs, that is motivated by love and reflects God's concern for and interest in the welfare of men, is a good work. In light of this definition, which we believe to be in harmony with the scriptures, we must insist and insist firmly and strongly that no one can justifiably deny any Christian or any congregation of Christians the



right to do anything at any time for any person that is calculated to render genuinely loving service to that person.

### ***Refuting the Legalists' So-called Scriptural Pattern***

Yet there are legalists who would limit the scope of good works by insisting that the church adhere to what they call a "scriptural pattern." They affirm that the New Testament specifies exclusively both the good works the church can engage in and the methods of doing these works, and that any deviation from this pattern is sinful. But their so-called *scriptural pattern* is entirely without scriptural authority.

First, in its teaching concerning good works, the New Testament deals not only with specifics but also with principles. There are indeed specific good works mentioned in the New Testament, but they are not meant to be exclusive. In 1 Timothy 5:10 Paul describes the faithful elderly widow as "well reported of for good works; if she hath brought up children, if she hath used hospitality to strangers, if she hath washed the saints' feet, if she hath relieved the afflicted, if she hath diligently followed every good work." Notice that in addition to the enumeration of good works, the apostle refers to "every good work," implying that there are other good works besides the ones he specifies.

1 Thessalonians 5:15 sums up the Christian's responsibility to others: "See that none render unto any one evil for evil; but always follow after that which is good, one toward another, and toward all." Here, as in so many other places in the New Testament, the apostle Paul deals with the *principle* of doing good to others. Whatever the Christian can do to serve his fellow men, even if it is not specified in the New Testament, comes within the scope of "following after that which is good, one to another, and toward all." It is characteristic of the legalists and formalists in the church that they must have everything "spelled out" before they will accept it as being scriptural, that they can see the specifics but miss the principles.

Second, where a method is specified in the New Testament for doing a good work, no exclusive pattern is necessarily implied. Such a method was simply the best way of doing good under the particular circumstances, but it may not be the best way under present circumstances. Who would be so foolish as to argue that because Paul ordained the church in Corinth to choose messengers to take its contribution to Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1-3), it necessarily follows that this method must be exclusively followed today in doing the same kind of work, thus ruling out the use of banking institutions and the postal service?

In fact, the Lord has never put a strait jacket on any generation of His followers to keep them from doing good, and no man has the right to do this. Any idea that we cannot engage in a particular good work because, under the circumstances, it cannot be done by a so-called *scriptural* method, is of the devil and not of God. *The actual performance of*

*good can never be compromised under any circumstances, at any place, at any time!* For example, if the only way certain needy children can be taken care of is in an orphans' home, those followers of Christ who are concerned about their welfare will see that they are placed and supported in such a home. If the best way of taking care of an indigent elderly person is in a home for aged, then that way is entirely pleasing to God. The *principle* of pure religion is to *do good*, whatever way it can best be accomplished, and the Lord's faithful followers will allow nothing to keep them from following this principle. See James 1:27. True, nothing is specifically said in the scriptures about orphans' homes, hospitals, homes for the aged, homes for unwed mothers, etc., but if these organizations can render Christian service to sick, suffering, sorrowing, needy human beings, then their existence is entirely justifiable and worthy of the support of the Lord's church.

Of course, the matter of judgment enters into the methods used to accomplish good works, and great care must therefore be exercised in choosing the best method for a particular good work. But we must never allow *method* to become more important than *good*, for it is better to accomplish good with a poor method than to accomplish no good at all. What insanity it is for any church of Christ to get into a negative, do-nothing rut, having no program at all for accomplishing good works, and then attempting to justify itself on the basis of not wanting to do anything contrary to the "divine pattern." It is the will of God that His children walk in *all* good works, and no appeal made to any so-called divine pattern can justify their failure to do so. Imagine letting some hungry person starve to death for fear of supplying him food in an "unscriptural" manner! Imagine letting some sick person die for fear of supplying him with medical aid in an "unscriptural" manner!

### ***Choosing Between Good and Good***

But we must be aware of the need of wisdom in accomplishing the most good we can with the means available. The choices we must make in life are not always between good and evil, but sometimes between good and good. For example, we may receive calls to help poor people in various areas, say in Mexico, Hong Kong, and India; and it may well be that we do not have the material means to answer all these calls. In fact, it would be impossible for the Lord's people to constantly feed, clothe, and administer medical aid to all the needy, sick people of the world. So in our plans to help such people, we face the perplexing problem of having to include some and exclude others. How do we make our choices in such matters? What about the limitation of time that makes it impossible for us to visit all the sick people in the community where we live? Whom do we visit and whom do we not visit? Certainly, we need to constantly pray to God for wisdom and guidance to make the *best* choice when we must choose between good and good, the choice that will best utilize our time, abilities, material means, etc. in serving others.

## *Preventive Good*

In our work of love in serving others, we must not overlook our responsibility of laboring to prevent the troubles and adversities that beset mankind. Surely, a hungry man needs food, no matter what brought on his hunger; a sick man needs medical aid, no matter what brought on his sickness; a man in prison needs counsel and understanding, no matter what brought on his imprisonment. But it is unrealistic to render aid to such as these without working diligently to eliminate the causes of their unfortunate situations. This writer firmly believes that it is as much a good work, a Christian responsibility, to help a man keep out of trouble as it is to help him once he has gotten into trouble. Indeed, preventive medicine is always better than curative medicine.

In serving the cause of Christ by serving our fellow men, we must probe the causes of poverty, sickness, crime, juvenile delinquency, etc. and do all that we can to eliminate these causes. For example, the country of India cannot possibly produce the necessary amount of food to feed its exploding population. In fact, if all the surplus food presently on hand in America were used to feed the hungry people of India, it would soon be exhausted and these poor unfortunates would be as hungry as they were before. Without question, the population must be controlled if hunger is eliminated from India, and any help that can be given to these people in the way of family planning is a poverty preventive and thus a good work. Even here in our own country there are women who have babies year after year which they and their husbands are unable to properly care for. Who can deny that help given to them in family planning so that they will bring no more children into the world than they are capable of supporting is a good work?

Let it be said here that Christians, who are to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves, are not to hide their heads ostrich-like in sand and fail to see what can best be done to help people. If job training will help a man overcome his poverty, then help him with job training—it is a *good work*. If medical research will eradicate disease, then support medical research—it is a *good work*. If family planning will help prevent poverty, then support family planning—it is a *good work*. To limit our good to helping those in adversity without working to eliminate the causes of their adversities is simply to perpetuate the troubles that beset mankind. Of all the peoples of the earth who should manifest wisdom in dealing with the problems of sickness, suffering, poverty, etc. it should be the people of God. But too often those who know not Christ show more wisdom in dealing with these problems than those who call themselves Christians. As Jesus expressed it, "The sons of this world are for their own generation wiser than the sons of the light" (Luke 16:8).

## *Determining What Is Good*

In being concerned about walking in good works, both in preventing

and curing the troubles and ills that beset mankind, the Christian must exercise wisdom to be as certain as possible that what he considers a good work is actually *good*, that it benefits rather than injures those for whom it is done. What is intended to be a good work may actually express zeal without knowledge. This characterizes the “do-gooder,” the not-too-wise person whose desire to serve others cannot be questioned, but who does more harm than good because he does not temper his zeal with knowledge, or understanding. For example, the “do-gooder” just *has* to do his *duty* in visiting some sick person, even though the doctor has recommended no visitors in this particular case. Obviously, his visit will do more harm than good; hence it is not truly a good work. But the wise person will make inquiry concerning such a case, if it is at all possible, consequently staying away not because he wants to take the easy way out, but because his genuine concern for the welfare of the sick is tempered with understanding.

Too often the “handouts” we give people express an indolence and carelessness that cannot bear the trouble of inquiring into the truth of an applicant’s case, and still less of undertaking the often extremely difficult task of determining how best to help the case. So we take the easy way out by indiscriminately giving to people without realizing that in some cases we are actually contributing to their delinquency, harming them rather than helping them. We must indeed be compassionate toward all men, but we must not confuse softheartedness with softheadedness.

It is axiomatic that anything we do for others, no matter how good our intentions may be, that in any way encourages them to wrong attitudes or wrong actions is a *bad* work, not a good work. The doting parent who indulges his children’s every whim and fancy will thwart their social development so that they will face much unhappiness in trying to adjust themselves to the world outside the home. Wise parents realize that they can do their children good by depriving them of some of the things they want. And even the chastisement loving parents administer their children is a good work, although it may not immediately seem as such to its recipients. See Hebrews 12:11.

The wise judge refuses to grant leniency to a hardened, impenitent criminal, not because he lacks mercy and compassion, but only because he knows that to release such a person from custody would not be good, either for the criminal or for society.

It is God’s will that people meet their personal responsibilities as they are able; and it is utterly wrong, even with the best intentions, for others to do for them what they are able to do for themselves. Paul declared, “For each man shall bear his own burden” (Galatians 6:5). There are certain burdens or responsibilities that each person has that are his and his alone, and for others to assume these responsibilities is only to encourage them in indolence and idleness. Concerning the lazy man who can work but refuses to do so, Paul commanded, “If any will not work,

neither let him eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10). To provide food for such a person would only encourage him in his laziness. He needs to be informed, kindly but firmly, that he can expect no handouts at all from faithful Christians, that if he chooses not to work he can suffer the consequences by going hungry. And if he himself is a Christian, the apostle Paul commands his fellow Christians to have no company with him, treating him as a disorderly brother. See 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14, 15, carefully noting these verses in their context.

### Questions

1. Discuss the passages which stress that Christians are to engage in every good work.
2. Define "good works."
3. What is wrong with the legalists' so-called scriptural pattern?
4. Discuss thoroughly the proposition that the actual performance of good can never be compromised under any circumstance, at any place, at any time.
5. Discuss the problem of choosing between good and good.
6. Why is *preventing* trouble as important, if not more important, than treating trouble? What are some of the ways we can prevent the adversities and troubles that beset mankind?
7. Discuss thoroughly the necessity of the Christian exercising wisdom to be as certain as possible that what he considers a good work is actually good, that it benefits rather than injures those for whom it is done.

## Lesson Eight

### SCOPE (2)

In using wisdom to determine what is really good in the treatment we extend others, we must recognize that what is often purported to be a good work may actually be meddling in other men's matters, the failure to mind one's own business. It is indeed our business to delve into people's lives when we can render them genuine assistance, but it is not our business to tend to those matters which are peculiarly and solely the personal concern of others. Thus we need to give heed to the exhortation of 1 Peter 4:15, "For let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evil-doer, or as *a meddler in other men's matters.*" The italicized portion of this verse is a single word in the Greek, *allotrioepiskopos*, occurring nowhere else in the New Testament. It literally means an inspector of strange things, or the things of another. Peter uses it here to designate one who pries into the affairs of another or, to put it bluntly, sticks his nose in other people's business. He may rationalize his behavior by claiming to have a real concern for others; but, in reality, he is an obnoxious boor, a trouble maker, who contributes little or nothing to the well-being of others.

#### *Hatred Masked As Love*

It is well to consider in this phase of our discussion that what purports to be a real service rendered others may actually be motivated by hatred masked as love, which can be destructive in its effects. Torquemada, the leading perpetrator of the Inquisition in Spain, undoubtedly persuaded himself that he was burning heretics at the stake because by destroying their bodies he could save their souls. Parents who unmercifully beat their children for virtually every mistake they make may persuade themselves that they do so because of their love for them, but their motivation is really hatred masked as love. The same thing can be said of parents who brow beat their children into submission to parental authority to the exclusion of independent thought and who impose their fears and prejudices on their children in the name of parental concern for their welfare.

In Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*, published in 1903 and satirizing mid-Victorian family life, is found one of the best illustrations of this counterfeit of parental love. Theobald, the father, and Christina, the mother, did not want a child and thus subconsciously rejected their son Ernest. Butler effectively illustrates the subtle frustrations and cruelties inflicted on Ernest by his parents under the guise of love, of concern for his welfare. The parents never admitted to themselves how bitterly they resented Ernest coming into their lives and how effectively they were venting their hatred and anger upon him, all in the name of love and duty. Butler observed, "Christina's version of the matter was that there

had never yet been two parents so self-denying and devoted to the highest welfare of their children as Theobald and herself.”

### *The Golden Rule*

In the golden rule Jesus has given us an infallible rule of conduct that determines what is truly *good* in our treatment of others: “All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Matthew 7:12). When there is neither command nor example in the scriptures that covers a particular course of action being contemplated in the treatment of another, the faithful Christian simply puts himself in that person’s position and asks himself if this is the treatment he should receive. Thus in considering how we ought to act toward any person, we are just to imagine that we change places with him. We are to be what he is, and he is to be what we are; and having mentally made the transfer of conditions, we are to treat him exactly as we would have him treat us.

In applying this rule, however, we are to do so *legitimately*, in keeping with the whole system of Christian ethics and love. Thus we must not make what we would *expect* others to do in our circumstances the rule of conduct; because we expect selfishness, we must not be selfish; that is retaliation. Moreover, we must not do to others what we could not *reasonably, ethically* expect them to do to us were our positions reversed. A judge, administering the laws of the state, knows very well that if he were in the situation of the prisoner standing before him, there is nothing he would desire more than an acquittal. Must he therefore release every prisoner he finds guilty? Must a rich man give up all his goods to another just because he would want this done to him were their positions reversed? The answer to these questions, and all similar ones, is obvious. The golden rule does not affirm that what we might wish others to do to us is to be the gauge of our conduct to them, but only what, according to the principles of equity and fairness and right, we ought to wish from them.

It is only as the Christian loves himself properly, and thus loves his neighbor properly, that he can legitimately apply the golden rule to every circumstance in his treatment of others. When the Christian loves himself properly, he will desire the treatment from others that is fair, honest, courteous, and considerate. Thus desiring this treatment from others because of the proper love he has for himself, he treats them in the same way because of the proper love he has for them.

Unquestionably, the Christian who carries with him the golden rule is prepared wherever he goes to walk continually in good works, rendering service to his fellow men that can truly be described as *Christian*.

### *Expensive Ointment*

When we consider the scope of good works, the full application of the

golden rule in our treatment of others, we must not make the mistake of limiting it to what is considered *practical*, such as food for the hungry, clothes for the naked, shelter for the homeless, medicine for the sick, etc.

There are down-to-earth souls in the church who view the expenditure of money for anything other than the foregoing as waste and frivolity. They would tacitly agree with those who complained about the expensive ointment that was poured on the head of Jesus by a certain woman of Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, recorded in Mark 14:4,5. "But there were some that had indignation among themselves, saying, To what purpose hath this waste of the ointment been made? For this ointment might have been sold for above three hundred shillings, and given to the poor. And they murmured against her." The Lord's rebuke of them is a rebuke of all others who would limit the scope of good works to the so-called practicalities of Christian service: "But Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor always with you, and whensoever ye will ye can do them good: but me ye have not always" (verses 6,7). Notice that Jesus described this sentimental, seemingly extravagant gesture as a "good work." Surely, the value of such a gesture to the Son of man has meaning also to all human beings who are sensitive to the gracious, sentimental expressions of love given them by others.

Human life cannot be reduced to the lowest common denominator of food for the stomach, clothes for the back, etc. Men are so made that they need more than these so-called necessities of life. They have an aesthetic sense than can be moved to ecstasy by the beautiful things of the world, hearts that can be uplifted by the sentimental, lovely tokens of affections they receive from their fellow men. A bouquet of flowers sent to some sick person may contribute as much to his recovery as the medicine prescribed by his doctor. Flowers, perfume, candy, and other such baubles a loving husband gives his wife along the way can do much to brighten and sweeten her life. It is God who created all the lovely things of the world, and we can be sure He is pleased when they are appropriately used as symbols and tokens of the love, endearment, and affection His children have for others. Cf. Matthew 6:28,29.

And we must not forget that kind, considerate, thoughtful words of praise and encouragement given our fellow men can contribute as much, sometimes even more, to their well-being as any food, drink, clothing, or shelter we might provide them. Thoughtful, loving Christians, who delight in walking in good works, even though they have little of material things to give others, can brighten the lives of their fellows with gracious words, whether spoken or written. We all need to take time out from our busy, hectic lives to write those notes or speak those words that will make the harshness of life more bearable for others.

*Thank God for all the kind, gracious, and sentimental gestures that come from loving, thoughtful people!*



## Prayer

A service that every Christian can render all men, which is truly a good work, is intercessory prayer. In truth, this may well be described as the basic service the Christian can render others; for, above all, men need the help of God that can be realized through the answers He gives to prayers offered on their behalf. All men are subjected to sorrow, suffering, temptation, and trouble; thus all men need divine succor and aid. When we who are Christians love our neighbors as ourselves, keenly feeling their burdens as if they were our very own, we will make intercession for them at the throne of divine grace, obeying the scriptural injunction, "I exhort therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings, be made for all men" (1 Timothy 2:1).

Notice some of the special classes of men for whom we should pray.

1. *Political leaders.* After the apostle had commanded Christians to pray for all men, he specified prayers "for kings and all that are in high place; that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and gravity" (1 Timothy 2:2).

2. *All Christians.* Those who walk in good works will pray also for the entire brotherhood, for all the Lord's followers: ". . . with all prayer and supplication praying at all seasons in the Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance and supplication for all the saints" (Ephesians 6:18). See Romans 1:9,10; 2 Corinthians 13:7; Ephesians 1:16-19; 3:14-19; Colossians 1:3,9-11; 4:12; 1 Thessalonians 1:2.

3. *Proclaimers of the word of God.* Special emphasis is placed in the New Testament on prayers offered for those who proclaim the divine word, the gospel of Christ; for example, 2 Thessalonians 3:1,2, "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run and be glorified, even as also it is with you; and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and evil men; for all have not faith." See Romans 15:30; 2 Corinthians 1:11; Colossians 4:2,3; 1 Thessalonians 5:25; Hebrews 13:18.

4. *Enemies.* The finest good work we can do for our enemies is to seek God's help for them through prayer, obeying the Lord's command: "Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you; that ye may be sons of your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:43-45).

Prayer is a good work that can be done by the poorest, most afflicted saint. Even though he may be bedridden so that he has no way of personally contacting the sick, fatherless, bereaved, and widows, and so poor that he cannot give much, if any, material assistance to the needy, he has the greatest power in the world with which to serve his fellows: the power of believing prayer, which has access to the unlimited power of the Giver of all good and perfect gifts. If any Christian fails to use this power, he fails to render men the service they most need. The Christian who abounds in good works must be a Christian who abounds in prayer.

## *In the Name of Christ*

As we further consider the scope of good works, we must recognize that no work is truly good unless it is done in the name of Christ. We are commanded, "And whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to the Father through him" (Colossians 3:17). Does this command affirm that when we do a good work we are to verbally state that it is done in the name of Christ? Not at all. This does not mean, however, that it would be wrong for us to inform the recipients of our good works that we are doing them as Christians, followers of Christ. But it is not the mere mouthing of a formula that is enjoined here; it is the relating of our entire life to the person of Christ, which His name represents: as disciples called by His name, who recognize His supreme authority, who seek His guidance, help and approval, who depend on His presence and power, in everything they do. Cf. Romans 14:8; 1 Corinthians 10:31; 2 Corinthians 5:15; 1 Peter 4:11.

George Barlow has written some worthy words concerning this command: "This exhortation embraces everything previously mentioned in the epistle, and every possible duty of the Christian life. The ruling principle of action in the believer is that of supreme devotion to the Lord; he is to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. All we have we owe to Him. He gave His all for us, and it is but a righteous return that we consecrate to Him all that is highest and best in ourselves. We must love Christ supremely, and then every faculty and power of our being will render homage and service to Him. We shall be obedient to His commands, we shall magnify His grace, we shall strive to walk worthy of His great name, and in all things seek to promote His glory. We pledge ourselves to Him for ever, and no consideration should tempt us to relax our devotion . . . We cannot say and do everything in the name of Christ unless we fully surrender ourselves to Him. We are helpless and full of spiritual infirmities, but the more conscious we are of our complete dependence on Him the stronger are we in labour and in hope. In our successes, lest we be puffed up with vanity—in our perplexities, lest we be discouraged—in our grief, lest we sink despairing into the abyss—and in our transports of joy, lest we be exalted above measure—there must ever be a full, voluntary, and conscious reliance on Jesus. Thus resting on Him and realizing His life-giving power, we can say with Paul, 'I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.'"

### **Questions**

1. What is meant by Peter's statement, "meddling in other men's matters"?
2. Illustrate how hatred can be masked as love.

3. Discuss the golden rule as the infallible rule of conduct that determines what is truly *good* in the treatment of others.
4. Discuss the importance of the sentimental, lovely tokens of affection that we receive from our fellow men.
5. Why is prayer such an important phase of walking in good works?
6. What is meant by the command given us in Colossians 3:17?

### CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE

In this series of lessons we are not advocating what is sometimes designated as the social gospel, which emphasizes ministering to man's temporal needs with the goal of making the world a better place in which to live, but which does not emphasize ministering to man's spiritual needs. Most certainly, man's supreme need is that of the saving power of Jesus Christ in deliverance from sin and in eternal life in heaven; and the supreme mission of the church, the Lord's people, is to proclaim this wonderful saving power as revealed in the gospel to dying sinners. But preaching the gospel is not sufficient for the church to accomplish its saving mission. Those who emphasize gospel preaching and teaching to the virtual exclusion of good works are as wrong as those who emphasize good works to the virtual exclusion of gospel preaching and teaching.

It is in good works that Christians have the power to influence men to accept the message of salvation in Christ, and all the preaching in the world that is not supported by a ministry that meets the various needs of men is sheer mockery. As L. Arnold Watson so aptly expressed it: "Our contemporaries will concern themselves with 'what' we believe only after they have clearly seen that our faith has done something to us and for us. Until they see the latter, they could care less what we teach and that each tenet of faith can be 'proved by the Bible.'" In truth, unless our faith produces a goodness that shows concern for men in all their needs, we can never influence them to accept the message we preach.

Can you imagine any person who calls himself a Christian going to a starving man and saying something like the following, "Friend, my responsibility to Christ is not to minister to the physical needs of people, but only to their spiritual needs. Therefore, I am not concerned about your need of physical food, but only about your need of spiritual food. So now hear me out as I teach you the gospel." Just what kind of response do you think he would receive?

An inescapable conclusion is that any congregation of the Lord's people which retreats from the real problems of a real world into the euphoria of public worship, or which limits its activities outside the church building to the spoken or printed proclamation of the gospel, has no feeling for the pulse of society and thus is without any real influence to reach sinners with the gospel. All the campaigns to build up attendance at worship services and Bible classes, and all the gospel meetings that are held, will have no significant impact on society at large until the church gets into the mainstream of life with a pounding heart of concern and compassion for all mankind that has forever been the hallmark of committed, converted Christians.

We had better face up to the plain fact that society in general is not

interested in the church and its message because the church in general is not concerned for society, with the tough, blunt questions it is asking and the real problems it is facing. Do you really think the world will listen to any people who look at humanity suspiciously from the sequestered cloister of a church building with eyes that refuse to see the reality of poverty, racial animosity and prejudice, disease, war, juvenile delinquency, alcoholism, dope addiction, etc.? When the church washes its hands of society, then society washes its hands of the church. Do you really want the world to come to the church building? Then be sure that you are going to the world, entering the haunts of woe and suffering to grapple with them and to alleviate the misery of the real people who are their victims.

### *The Salt of the Earth*

Jesus said, "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men" (Matthew 5:13). In His metaphor of salt to describe His disciples, the Lord implies that the only way they can give society the savoring influence of Christianity is to mix and mingle with men, getting out into the world and diffusing throughout society the influence of good works, works that reflect the goodness of Christ. As T. L. Cuyler observed, "Every farmer will tell you that seed-corn is of no value until it is planted, and his heap of fertilizer is of no use until it is scattered over the soil. Jesus Christ tells His disciples that they are the salt of the earth, but everything depends upon its being put into the right place. A barrel of salt set in the corner of the butcher's stall is of no more use than a barrel of sawdust; it must be brought into contact with every inch of the meat in order to prevent decomposition. Spiritual salt is of little value to the community as long as it is barrelled up in a church, however orthodox may be the brand stamped on it. The salt must be scattered so as to touch and to season those who are tending to moral corruption. How tenderly did the Lord Jesus Christ put Himself in contact with the diseased and depraved!"

How does Jesus, under the metaphor of salt, describe His disciples who are not giving to society the savoring and saving influence of good works? *Good for nothing!* As literal salt that has lost its savor is useless, so Christians who have lost their savor are useless. A Christian may retreat from the world of trouble, tribulation, poverty, and disease by hiding behind a facade of religious orthodoxy, but he is *nothing!* He may resoundly boast about his loyal stand of the truth, but if he fails to walk among men in good works, he is *nothing!*

### *The Light of the World*

Jesus also describes the influence of His disciples who walk in good works under the metaphor of light: "Ye are the light of the world. A

city set upon a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a lamp, and put it under a bushel, but on the stand; and it shineth unto all that are in the house. Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16).

The Lord's disciples are indeed responsible for proclaiming Him as the light of the world, the Saviour of men; but if they would influence men to accept the gospel message, they must openly, before men, reflect the light of Him who is "the true light, even the light which lighteth every man, coming into the world" (John 1:9). No Christian can possibly portray to others the true light Christ, who walked among men during His earthly ministry in good works, and fail to follow this pattern by walking in good works himself. It is the light of Christ that men *see* in His disciples that will influence them to accept what they *hear* concerning Him as the light of the world.

Someone has said, "Our lives must be incarnations of the Gospel, epistles of life and truth and love. The highest evidence of Christianity, and its strongest recommendation to the world, are lives that are unmistakably Christlike. A serious condemnation of Christian living was expressed by a Buddhist, who was in search of truth and light, when he said, "I want to believe in Christ, but I have never seen him in those who profess to follow him." Dr. J. Stuart Holden once expressed his opinion that 'the reason why the world does not know God is because it knows us so well.'"

The light we are to let shine before men is not only meant to influence sinners, but also saints. We have a responsibility to bring the influence of good works to bear upon our fellow Christians so that they will follow our example to the glorification of God. Hebrews 10:24 expresses this responsibility: ". . . let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works." That the word "provoke" here includes verbal exhortation is plainly evident in light of such passages as Hebrews 3:13 and 2 Timothy 3:16,17; 4:1-4. But just as sinners need the influence of good works to incite them to give heed to the will of God, so also do our fellow saints.

After Paul had exhorted Titus to "speak the things which befit the sound doctrine" to his fellow Christian, he urged him, "in all things showing thyself an ensample of good works" (Titus 2:1,7). The connection between these two exhortations is plain: if Titus would induce his fellow Christians to obey his *teaching* concerning good works he must be sure that he sets before them the *example* of good works. Read Acts 20:17-35; 1 Timothy 4:12.

### *Adorning the Doctrine*

In his message to Titus, Paul speaks of adorning the doctrine of God: "Exhort servants to be in subjection to their own masters, and to be well-pleasing to them in all things; not gainsaying; not purloining, but

showing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour" (Titus 2:9,10). The status of these servants (Greek *doulous*, slaves) whom Titus was to exhort was most deplorable. They had no legal rights at all, their masters having the power of life and death over them. Chrysostom points out that their moral character was generally bad. The brutalizing effect of their enforced servitude gave them no incentive for being good. But when slaves were converted to Christ, they had something to hope and live for. They were now the Lord's workmanship, created in Him for good works. Thus they were exhorted to adorn the doctrine of God by rendering their masters honest, zealous, loving service, with the possibility that their masters, no matter how unreasonable they might be, would form a high opinion of the doctrine that had accomplished such a wonderful transformation in their slaves. Undoubtedly, there were masters who were converted to Christ through the influence of their Christlike slaves.

The responsibility Paul enjoined on Christian slaves is also the responsibility of all other Christians. No matter what his social or economic status may be, each Christian is to so live that he will "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour." Some other renderings of this phrase are: "beautify the teaching of God our Saviour" (Verkuyl); "be an ornament to the doctrine of God our Saviour" (Moffat); "do credit to the teaching of our Saviour God" (Weymouth). By his good works the Christian will accentuate the beauty and attractiveness of the doctrine of God, thus making it desirable to others.

History relates that the power the early church had in overcoming paganism was not just in the message it proclaimed, but in the godly influence of its members who walked in good works. As Chrysostom expressed it, "For the heathen do not judge the Christian's doctrines from the doctrine, but from his actions and life." And the church today can overcome the paganism that prevails in contemporary society as it abounds in good works, for the world still judges the doctrine it represents from its *doing* rather than its *saying*.

In the final analysis, nothing can overcome evil but good. So Paul commands us, "But if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him to drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:20,21). Here the apostle says that we can overcome the enmity of men by acts of kindness, so that the person who has been our enemy can become our friend. And by such acts of kindness, those who were once at enmity with God can be influenced to become His friends.

### ***Appealing Good Works***

We must recognize, however, that some of the good which Christians render others is anything but influential in leading them to Christ. It can even be repulsive to them. Again, we see the necessity of our good works

being permeated with the attitude of love and kindness so that they will attract men to Christ rather than repel them. In this light, it is interesting to note that there are two different Greek words rendered as "good" in the New Testament: *kalos* and *agathos*. In his notes on the first epistle of Peter, Fenton Hort says that "*agathos* denotes what is good in virtue of results, and *kalos* denotes the kind of goodness that is at once seen to be good." In his notes on the epistle of James, he says virtually the same thing: "*Kalos* is what is good as seen, as making a direct impression on those who come in contact with it—not only good in result, which would be *agathos*."

The word used in Matthew 5:16 for the *good* works that cause men to glorify God is not *agathos* but *kalos*, which stresses not just the utilitarian basis of Christian service but such service that is permeated with love, kindness, and compassion that it has great appeal, beauty, and attractiveness to all who see it.

We have all known of those in the church who do good to others that is grim, cold, and austere, which can never portray the beauty of Christ-like goodness, and thus can never influence men to come to the beautiful Saviour.

Peter wrote to the Jewish Christians, ". . . having your behavior seemly among the Gentiles; that, wherein they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good (*kalos*) works, which they behold, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:12). This propaganda (to borrow an ugly word) value of good works is also expressed by Paul in his instructions to the Christian widows that they "be well reported of for good (*kalos*) works" (1 Timothy 5:10). James commands the wise and understanding Christian to "show by his good (*kalos*) life his works in meekness of wisdom" (James 3:13).

Whatever Christians do in the service of others, they must do it as "good (*kalos*) stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10), living such gracious, winsome lives that they will tend to woo men to Christ. For it is the *kalos* of Christian service that has the power to create in others a desire to enjoy the beautiful life in Christ. Do you zealously engage in *kalos* works?

## Questions

1. What is wrong with the so-called social gospel?
2. If the church effectively preaches the gospel, why is it so necessary that it be concerned for society?
3. What does Jesus imply in His description of His disciples under the metaphor of salt?
4. Discuss the Lord's description of His faithful disciples as the light of the world.



5. What is meant by the phrase "adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour"?
6. How was the early church able to overcome paganism? How can the church today overcome the paganism that prevails in contemporary society?
7. What is the difference in meaning between *kalos* and *agathos*?
8. Discuss the use of *kalos* in I Peter 2:12; I Timothy 5:10; James 3:13; I Peter 4:10.

## EXAMPLE OF JESUS

The earthly life of Jesus was one of supreme devotion to the service of mankind; hence, His followers can receive from His example the greatest encouragement and inspiration to walk in good works. And His followers do indeed need the incitement for good works from His example! They need *showing* as well as *telling* the life of good works. One of the reasons why so many Christians fail to bear fruit in good works is that although they have seen the *precepts* of Christ, they have failed to see the *life* of Christ and thus are without the challenge and inspiration of His example to serve mankind. Assuredly, they need to know everything He teaches about Christian service, but they also need the incitement to follow this teaching by His perfect example. Cf. Matthew 16:24; 1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 Peter 2:21,22.

In describing the purpose of his first advent, Jesus said, “. . . the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). The entirety of the Lord’s earthly sojourn can be summed up by the one word, *service*. As His followers are created in Him for good works, so the purpose of His coming into the world was to perform good works, culminated in the giving of His body on the cross for the sins of the world. The service of mankind, in submission to the Father’s will, was the supreme aim of His life; and it must also be the supreme aim of all who would follow Him.

Speaking to Cornelius and his household, Peter said, “. . . Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him” (Acts 10:38). Here the apostle describes the presence of Jesus in this world by the simple but eloquent statement, *who went about doing good*. No one has truly seen Jesus through the eye of faith who has not seen Him as the great servant of mankind; as the perfect doer of good whose earthly walk was constantly in good works.

### *Attitude Toward Man*

Since *men, human beings, people* were the beneficiaries of the Lord’s good works, as they also are of the good works of His followers, we cannot understand and thus imitate His ministry unless we also understand the basic attitude toward men that produced this ministry. Indeed, it is primarily His attitude toward men that the Lord would have His followers imitate; for if they *think* as He thought, they will also *do* as He did. It is to the imitating of this attitude that Paul appeals in Philippians 2:4-7, “. . . not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also

to the things of others. Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross."

What was the "mind" of Christ, which all Christians should have, that caused Him to come to this earth, "taking the form of a servant," to serve men and to die on the cross? Its all-inclusive, all-embracing essence is *love*. The humility of the Lord in taking upon Himself the human form to be the supreme servant of mankind can only be explained in terms of His loving attitude toward both God and men. See John 4:34; 13:34; 14:31; 15:12; 2 Corinthians 5:14; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 5:25; 1 John 3:16; Revelation 1:5. The Lord's entire earthly ministry declared that nothing was more important to Him, next to His heavenly Father, than *people*. Perfectly *caring* for people, He was motivated to perfectly *serve* them. Thus when we are commanded to walk in love, which is equivalent to being commanded to walk in good works, it is on the basis of following the example of Jesus: "Walk in love, even as Christ loved you, and gave himself up for us" (Ephesians 5:2).

Since "by the grace of God he should taste of death for *every* man" (Hebrews 2:9), it necessarily follows that Jesus' love embraces every man. He was entirely devoid of the false respectability that would keep Him from associating with the lower dregs of society. As a "friend of publicans and sinners" (Luke 7:34), He willingly associated Himself with the people who were considered as living beyond the pale of polite, respectable society. In so doing He incurred the wrath of the "orthodox" religious community, which had made a mockery of religion in its failure to render loving service to all human beings. For example, as recorded in Luke 15:1,2, "Now all the publicans and sinners were drawing near unto him to hear him. And both the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." As the result of their unjust and unloving criticism of Jesus for His interest in and concern for these social and religious pariahs, the scribes and Pharisees brought forth from Him in His parable of the prodigal son the ugly but valid picturization of themselves in the unloving, unfeeling, unsympathetic elder brother (Luke 15:25-30)—for nothing aroused the indignation of Jesus more than man's inhumanity to man.

The loving heart of Jesus was deeply and keenly touched by the sight of mankind's earthly plight and predicament so that He was prompted to render service to men whenever He had the opportunity. A familiar word used in the New Testament to designate this attitude is "compassion," from the Greek *splachnizomai*, meaning "*to be moved as to one's bowels*, hence *to be moved with compassion* (for the bowels were thought to be the seat of love and pity)" (Joseph Thayer); "have pity, feel sym-

pathy" (Arndt-Gingrich). The Latin derivation of this word throws light on its meaning: *com*, with and *passus*, suffer; hence to suffer with. That is exactly what Jesus did when He saw men: he suffered with them as if their distress was His distress, their pain His pain, their sorrow His sorrow. And the good works He did for them were but the expression of this wonderful compassion He had for them.

Someone has suggested that there is a sort of "sweet monotony" in the way this attitude of compassion is attributed to Jesus in the gospels. He had a perfect passion for helping, healing, comforting. There was not a single ill to which men were subjected that Jesus did not "suffer with" them. Three things especially called out His compassion, resulting in the help He extended men.

1. He was "moved with compassion" for physical want and need. One day He said, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days and have nothing to eat: and I would not send them away fasting, lest haply they faint on the way" (Matthew 15:32). The sight of the poverty-stricken people of the world always stirred the Lord's heart of pity and sympathy. He himself knew what it was to be poor. He had no place he could call home, declaring that "the foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20). Undoubtedly, He had suffered the pangs of hunger many times. He was always "moved with compassion" at the sight of famished people.

It is not necessary to protest here that the Lord's primary business in serving men pertains to their spiritual needs, that "the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). But we will form a totally false impression of the Lord's earthly ministry if we imply that He had no concern for the bodies of men. Of course, the Lord's ultimate concern for man was the salvation of their souls, but He also was concerned about the external circumstances under which they lived. His loving heart was stirred to its depths by the sight of man's temporal needs. Among His sternest warnings were those directed to men who, like the rich man in His parable recorded in Luke 16:19-31, neglected the poor who were at their gates. The Christian is bound, in following the example of his Master, to remember the poor. Cf. Acts 20:35. As we have previously noted, to reduce Christianity to a sort of program of social reform is a grave error on the one hand, but to say that it has nothing to do with the various troubles and problems of society is to be guilty of as grave an error on the other hand. *Christlike people realize that the poor are their concern.*

2. The Lord was also "moved with compassion" for pain and sorrow. He "suffered with" every sufferer. It was from this infinite compassion of His for pain, suffering, and sorrow that nearly all His acts of power sprang. Virtually all His miracles were the product of His pity and sympathy. A leper besought Him to set him free from his repulsive, corrosive

disease, and Jesus, "moved with compassion, stretched forth his hand and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou made clean" (Mark 1:41).

Two blind men sat by the wayside at Jericho begging. The crowd tried to silence them when they cried out for the Lord's healing mercy and power. But He called them, and "moved with compassion, touched their eyes; and straightway they received their sight, and followed him" (Matthew 20:34).

One day the Lord was walking into Nain, and near the gate He met a funeral procession. The body of a young man, the only son of his widowed mother, was being carried. The sadness of it touched the Lord's heart. When He "saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came nigh and touched the bier: and the bearers stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother" (Luke 7:13-15).

Our Master was indeed moved with compassion for the suffering and sorrow-stricken and was quick to minister unto them. Are we following His example? Even though we can perform no miracles, are we doing what we can by God's grace to alleviate their unhappy plight?

3. *The Lord was preeminently "moved with compassion" for the havoc and ruin caused by sin.* The gospel record states that "when Jesus saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). Here the picture is that of those lost in sin, like sheep not having a shepherd. They had wandered away from their divine Shepherd and had become exposed to the perils and disasters of sin. And for such Jesus had come to the world to seek and to save.

They were "distressed and scattered." The Greek word for "distressed" literally means "flayed, torn, mangled." Like literal sheep that go astray and fall prey to prowling beasts that tear and mangle them, so those who depart from the living God fall prey to the devil, who leaves them torn and mangled in sin. See 1 Peter 5:8.

The Greek word for "scattered" literally means "thrown down, prostrate." Jesus also saw sinners as those trampled down, prostrate, unable to rise, for that is what sin does to men—it not only tears and mangles them, but it also tramples on them so that they do not have the power to rise. It means disablement as well as disfigurement, and that disablement, unless rescue comes, is bound to end in death.

*Nothing moved Christ to compassion as the sight of sin.* In His all-discerning eyes, poverty and pain were not nearly to be so dreaded as sin. The effects of poverty and pain are limited, but the effects of sin are infinite and eternal. Therefore, primarily, the earthly ministry of Jesus pertains to saving people from their sins, to rescue and lift those who have gone astray. All the good works He did in ministering to the physical

needs of men were meant to influence them to accept the supreme sacrifice He made in dying for their sins on the cross. "The good shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

And whoever would be a genuine, faithful Christian must, in following the example of his Lord, be moved with compassion at the sight of the havoc and ruin wrought by sin. He must therefore never lose sight of the goal of his good works: influencing men to glorify God by becoming His new creation through the saving power of Christ. Combined with the influence of their good works must be their active seeking of lost souls through the proclamation of the gospel.

### *Washing the Disciples' Feet*

In the Lord's act of washing His disciples' feet we see the humility of love that is willing to do even what might be considered the most menial of services, thus affirming that no act that renders service to others is beneath the dignity of those with loving, compassionate hearts: ". . . he took a towel, and girded himself. Then he poureth water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. . . So when he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and sat down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me, Teacher, and, Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you" (John 13:4,5, 12-16).

The exhortation that Jesus gives for His disciples to wash each other's feet does not pertain to a religious rite, but symbolizes the very humblest *real* service we can render others. As Albert Barnes observed, "It is the manifest design of Jesus here to inculcate a lesson of humility; to teach them by his example that they ought to condescend to the most humble offices for the benefit of others. They ought not to be proud, and vain, and unwilling to befriend each other in every way." Have you learned this lesson? Are you following the example of Jesus in willingly and lovingly doing anything you can to be of service to your fellow men?

### **Questions**

1. Why do we need the Lord's example of walking in good works?
2. Discuss the purpose of Jesus' first advent as expressed in Matthew 20:28.
3. What is the all-inclusive, all-embracing essence of the mind of Christ? Thoroughly discuss Philippians 2:4-7.
4. Discuss the criticism leveled at Jesus by the scribes and Pharisees

because of His association with the publicans and sinners. How did Jesus respond to this criticism?

5. What is meant by the word "compassion," which is so significant concerning the attitude of Jesus toward men?
6. Discuss the Lord's compassion for physical want and need.
7. Discuss the Lord's compassion for pain and sorrow.
8. Why was the Lord preeminently "moved with compassion" for the havoc and ruin caused by sin?
9. What lesson do we receive from the example of Jesus washing His disciples' feet?

## Lesson Eleven

### NEGLIGENCE

The Christian is duly warned of negligence in Hebrews 2:1-3, "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard, lest haply we drift away from them. For if the word spoken through angels proved stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we *neglect* so great a salvation? which having at the first been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard." Although the reference in this passage to negligence pertains specifically to salvation, the negligence of good works is necessarily implied since no Christian can give due regard to his salvation in Christ, realized through faith in Him, who fails to give due regard to the Lord's will concerning good works.

#### *Greatest Danger*

Notice that the word used here is not *reject* but *neglect*, from the Greek *ameleō*, meaning "to be careless, heedless." The greatest danger that confronts the Christian is not that he will ever *reject*, with malice and forethought, the divine will concerning his responsibility to walk in good works, but that he will *neglect* this great responsibility, becoming careless and heedless concerning the service of others. Rarely, if ever, will you find a Christian who has carefully, deliberately decided that he will not help others. It is hardly imaginable that any Christian who professes to believe that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God and the supreme authority in religion would ever think or say anything like the following: "I know it is my Christian duty, taught by Christ and His apostles, to walk in good works, but I refuse to do so. I will not do good to my fellow men." Yet there are many, many claimant believers in Christ who live selfishly, doing little or nothing to help others. Have they deliberately conspired against their spiritual welfare, deliberately refusing to obey the Lord in serving others? Certainly not! They are not vicious, not cruel—just *negligent*. And, after all, life's greatest tragedies result not from cruelty or viciousness, but from *negligence*, the inadvertent, undeliberate failure to give heed to the Christian responsibility of loving and serving one's fellow men.

#### *Difficult to Recognize*

We can see how negligence poses such a great threat to the Christian's spiritual welfare when we realize how subtly it can become part of one's habitual life pattern and thus how difficult it is for us to recognize its exceeding sinfulness, with its devastating, tragic effects. We are so prone to think only of sin as something which is overt that we find its exceedingly difficult to label a negligent person as evil. Indeed, the conventional



idea of a good Christian is expressed virtually entirely in terms of what he does *not* do: a good Christian does not get drunk, does not steal, does not use profanity, does not commit murder, etc. In other words, the conventionally good Christian is a "negative moral sign." Do we realize that a Christian, a child of God, can abstain from every overt sin that exists and still be a consummately wicked person because of his negligence of good works? But trying to convince a negatively moral Christian of this is just about as difficult a task as can be undertaken.

A woman has been granted audience by the governor of her state. She is pleading for the life of her son who is under the sentence of death for the crime of murder. But the governor refuses to grant her request and save the life of her son. Finally, she cries out in great anguish, "Sir, what have I done to deserve this?" The governor immediately replies, "My dear, it is not a question of what you have done, but of what you have failed to do—not that you deliberately worked against your son's welfare, but that, like so many other *nice* people who are parents, you *neglected* to give your son the proper home training."

(*What have I done?*) That question is the key to understanding the subtle danger of negligence. Virtually any Christian who lies, steals, gets drunk, commits fornication, or such like knows that he is guilty of sin, that such actions transgress the law of God and are thus displeasing to Him. But try to convince the Christian who is negligent concerning good works, but who does not commit any of the forementioned sins, that he is living in sin, and he will probably retort, "What have I done?"—as if to say, "I haven't done any wrong; I try to live a good, clean, moral Christian life." And so such a person feels secure in his negative, do-nothing, conventional Christian morality, considering himself a faithful follower of Christ.

Let us further illustrate the subtle danger of negligence. Each of two men has a wife. One of them does about everything he can, short of murder, to deliberately hurt his wife, both physically and mentally. He curses her, beats her with his fists until her body is virtually covered with bruises, insults her in public, and deliberately refuses to do anything that would bring her even an iota of pleasure and happiness. The other man is conventionally a nice, clean-cut person who would never even remotely think of causing his wife any kind of misery or unhappiness at all. He never says a harsh word to her, but, on the other hand, he never says a kind word to her. He never inflicts physical pain on her, but, on the other hand, he never does anything to make her life with him comfortable, pleasant, and happy. He does not deliberately conspire against her welfare but simply, like so many other husbands, *neglects* her. Now, just to be honest, who seems to be the worse husband: the cruel, vicious one or the negligent one? Are we shocked at the cruelty of the one but not at the negligence of the other? Will not the wife who is neglected as surely suffer great unhappiness as the one who is

treated with deliberate cruelty? If the wife of the cruel, vicious husband finally leaves him, he will hardly be unaware that he drove her to this by his shameful treatment of her. But if the wife of the negligent husband finally leaves him, he will probably be quite unaware that he is entirely responsible for her action, thinking of himself as a good and faithful husband.

Each of two women is the mother of a small child. In a fit of fiendish cruelty, one of them uses a hatchet to kill her child in cold blood. The other feels that she truly loves her child; she would not even remotely think of inflicting any kind of injury or pain on him. Yet she is a negligent mother, so busy pursuing her selfish pleasures and interests that she neglects the proper care of her child. In weakened bodily resistance, resulting from malnutrition, the child contracts a dreaded disease and is taken to a hospital where he dies after several weeks of terrible pain. Is the negligent mother any less guilty of being responsible for the death of her child than the mother who killed her child in cold blood? Yet it is difficult for us to feel that she is as wicked in the eyes of God as the cruel mother; but, in fact, her negligence actually caused more pain and misery to her child than the cruelty of the other caused her child. However, she will never be taken into custody and tried for murder or be sent to a hospital for the criminally insane, as will happen to the mother who deliberately killed her child. She will be able to hold her head high in society and for a long time to come will piously, self-righteously whine, "What have I done to deserve this? I loved my child and tried to be a good mother; why has my child been taken from me?"

Take a good look at the congregation of which you are a member. How many members are there whose religious activities are virtually solely limited to attendance at worship services, who *never* visit the sick, comfort the sorrowing, etc., yet who are not guilty of drunkenness, stealing, profanity, or other such overt sins? No fellowship will be withdrawn from them; they are generally considered as members in good standing and are glibly referred to as *faithful* members.

### *The Last Judgment*

In looking again at the description of the last judgment as recorded in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, we note that the Lord does not accuse the "goats" of having been guilty of the so-called sins of immorality, such as stealing, murder, lying, adultery, and such like. Neither does He accuse them of having failed to attend religious services. Indeed, many of them were in all probability conventionally nice people, who had considered themselves faithful members of the Lord's church. And it is also significant that the Lord does not accuse them of having deliberately, with malice and forethought, withheld good from the hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, and imprisoned, nor of having in any way overtly mistreated these unfortunates, to make their unhappy plight worse. The description,

in the main, can well portray those Christians who had been apathetic, heedless, and careless concerning good works—not mean, not vicious, not cruel, but just *negligent*. Yet in neglecting good works, they neglected “so great a salvation,” with the eventual consequence being the eternal loss of their souls: “Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels . . . and these shall go away into eternal punishment” (Matthew 25:41,46).

And notice that those Christians who omit good works from their lives, even if only from carelessness or negligence, are described as “cursed,” being entirely without the approbation of God. Are you a *cursed* person? See James 4:17.

### ***Important Exhortations***

Those who have become spiritually lulled to sleep by their negligence of good works need to heed the command, “Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine upon thee. Look therefore carefully how ye walk, not as unwise, but as wise; redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:14-16).

As a preventive of negligence, the faithful Christian is exhorted to “give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard” (Hebrews 2:1), to be continually aware of and responsive to all the divine word says concerning good works.

Every Christian is exhorted to “be careful to maintain good works” (Titus 3:8). The word “careful” in the Greek suggests here the idea of being interested to the point of anxiety in the maintenance of good works, which means that the Christian should have such a deep interest in serving others that he will never succumb to negligence, carelessness, or heedlessness in this responsibility. Concerning the passage under consideration, Alexander Maclaren wrote, “The word that the apostle employs [*phrontizo*, careful] is a very remarkable one, only used in this one place in the New Testament; and the force of it might be given by that colloquialism which I have ventured to employ—‘Giving your minds to maintaining good works.’ You have to make a definite effort to bring before you the virtues and excellencies which you ought to possess, and then to try your best to have them. And my text suggests one means of securing that result, and that is, the habit—which I am afraid is not a habit with a great many professing Christians—the habit of meditation upon the facts of the gospel revelation looked at in their practical bearing on our daily life and character. We should bring ourselves into that atmosphere, and saturate our minds and hearts with the thoughts of God’s great love to us in Jesus Christ’s death for us, of the pattern of His life, of the gift of His Spirit, of the hope of inheritance of eternal life. We should by frequent meditation submit ourselves to the power of these sacred thoughts, and we shall find that in them, one by one, are motives which, twisted together, will make a cord of love that shall draw us out of the

pit of selfishness and the mire of sense, and shall attract us joyfully along the path of obedience, else too hard for our reluctant and unaccustomed feet.”

As we give heed to the exhortation “to be careful to maintain good works,” we must also give heed to the exhortation, “And let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Galatians 6:9). The Greek word for “weary” is *ekluo*, meaning “slack, give out” (Arndt-Gingrich). Many negligent Christians allowed the disappointments and frustrations involved in serving others to cause them to become slack or to give out. The path of duty is often found to be a path of great disappointment. Efforts to do good are often misunderstood. Even our fellow disciples may ridicule the helping hand we extend our fellow men, impugning our motives and treating our hopes of success as visionary and absurd. Often the beneficiaries of our good show no gratitude at all for what we have done to help them. But the vigilant, patient, careful Christian will never allow any of these discouragements and disappointments to swerve him from the path of good works; he will never “faint.” He has his hope firmly set upon the season when he “shall reap,” when at the second coming of Christ he shall hear the glorious words, “Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

“If we would not grow weary or negligent, let us pray for persevering grace. It was David’s prayer, ‘hold thou me up and I shall be safe,’ and it was Beza’s prayer, ‘Lord, perfect what Thou hast begun in me.’ That we may hold on a Christian course, let us labor for three persevering graces. Faith keeps from fainting; faith gives a substance to things not seen, and makes them to be as it were present. As a perspective glass makes those things which are at a distance near the eye, so doth faith: heaven and glory seem near. A Christian will not be weary of service, that hath the crown in his eye. The second persevering grace is hope. Hope animates the spirit: it is to the soul as cork to the net, which keeps it from sinking. Hope breeds patience, and patience breeds perseverance. The third persevering grace is love. Love makes a man so that he is never weary. Love may be compared to the rod of myrtle in the traveller’s hand, which refresheth him, and keeps him from being weary in his journey. He who loves the world, is never weary of following the world; he who loves God will never be weary of serving Him; that is the reason why the saints and angels in heaven are never weary of praising and worshipping God; because their love to God is perfect, and love turns service into delight. Get the love of God in your hearts, and you will run in His ways, and not be weary” (C. M. Merry).

No Christian can possibly ever become negligent concerning good works if he will give constant, careful heed to the following injunction: “Do all the good you can (1 Timothy 6:17-19), in all the ways you can (1 Corinthians 15:58), to all the people you can (Matthew 5:44,45), at all

the times you can (Proverbs 3:27,28), as long as you can (Ecclesiastes 9:10); do all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).”

### Questions

1. Why does the negligence of "so great a salvation" on the part of any Christian imply his negligence of good works?
2. Why is there a greater danger that the Christian will *neglect* rather than *reject* his responsibility to walk in good works?
3. Discuss the negligence of good works that is implied in the failure of the "goats" to minister to the hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, and imprisoned.
4. Discuss the need of the negligent Christian giving heed to the command recorded in Ephesians 5:14-16.
5. How does Hebrews 2:1 say that the faithful Christian can prevent negligence?
6. Discuss the exhortation of Titus 3:8 that the Christian must "be careful to maintain good works."
7. What are some of the disappointments and discouragements that face the Christian as he walks in good works, which can cause him to become "weary in well-doing"?
8. In light of our study concerning the negligence of good works, why would it be well for every Christian to obey the command given in 2 Corinthians 13:5?

## THE CONTRIBUTION (1)

A very important if not the basic phase of the use of money in good works is the contribution the Christian makes each first day of the week in the assembly of the saints, to "lay by him in store, as he may prosper" (1 Corinthians 16:2). Paul had this responsibility in mind when he commanded, "But as ye abound in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all earnestness, and in your love to us, *see that ye abound in this grace also*" (2 Corinthians 8:7). Do you abound in this grace? Does your contribution compare favorably to the standard of acceptable giving as revealed in the Bible? You will be able to answer these questions if you will honestly answer the questions pertaining to your contribution that follow in this lesson and in the concluding lesson.

### *Does It Express Faithful Christian Stewardship?*

Faithful Christian stewardship is based on the valid assumption of God's absolute, inalienable ownership of all things. "The earth is Jehovah's and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Psalms 24:1). "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. . . If I were hungry, I would not tell thee; for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof" (Psalms 50:10,12). "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith Jehovah of hosts" (Haggai 2:8). Cf. Colossians 1:16. God will never convey away His right and title as absolute owner of all things. Generation after generation He has permitted men to use His possessions, but never has He surrendered to them His proprietorship. He is still, and always will be, "possessor of heaven and earth" (Genesis 14:22). See Deuteronomy 8:11,17,18; Job 1:21.

Since the faithful Christian, above all others, recognizes the Creator's absolute proprietorship of all things, he is thoroughly aware of his relationship to Him as that of a steward, one who has been entrusted with the care of God's property. A steward manages the affairs and possessions of another without laying claim to ownership. What, then, about the Christian's money? Can he rightfully claim absolute ownership of it? Absolutely not! It has been given him as a trust, to be used in ways which will please his Master. The Christian is held accountable for every cent of money God has placed in his care. Thus he cannot fail to contribute liberally in support of the Lord's work and be faithful to this trust. If we are "good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10), we will surely be good stewards in our weekly contribution.

But we must remember that the stewardship of money involves the relationship of the Christian to God as belonging to Him in the whole person: ". . . and ye are not your own; for ye were bought with a price: glorify God therefore in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19,20). Thus the

surrender of the whole person to God must precede the devotement of our material means to Him. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service" (Romans 12:1).

In seeking to incite the saints in Corinth to liberal giving, Paul referred to the bountiful contribution made by the churches in Macedonia: ". . . their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality" (2 Corinthians 8:2). Why did such poverty-stricken people give so liberally? Because "first they gave their own selves to the Lord" (verse 5). Why do so many members of the body of Christ fail to give liberally? Because they have not first given themselves to the Lord; they are not truly converted to Him. It is axiomatic that personal consecration must precede pocketbook consecration.

Only the Christian who recognizes God's absolute ownership of all things, who recognizes that he is a steward of the manifold grace of God, will be a faithful steward in his weekly contribution. When he gives to the Lord, he feels as David, who, when he contemplated the first great contribution made by the Israelites for the temple which was to be erected in Jerusalem, was moved with deep gratitude as he recognized the gracious hand of God in it all, and he reverently exclaimed, "Blessed be thou, O Jehovah, the God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O Jehovah, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Jehovah, and thou art exalted as head above all . . . for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee" (1 Chronicles 29:10,11,14).

*To be perfectly honest, does your contribution express faithful, consecrated Christian stewardship?*

### ***Does It Express Seeking First God's Kingdom and His Righteousness?***

Consider the principle given by Jesus in Matthew 6:33 in relation to the Christian's obligation to remember God first in the use of the money entrusted in his care: "But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." If we seek God's kingdom and His righteousness *first* in our lives, we will not spend money on ourselves and families first, and then give the leavings to God. God, the divine proprietor, must come *first*, even before we consider the so-called necessities of life. The Christian who gives to God only after he has provided food, drink, shelter, etc. for himself and family dishonors his Creator.

God has always demanded that He be given the first-fruits of His followers' income. The first acceptable gift God received from man which is recorded on the pages of inspiration was the first-fruits of Abel's flock: "And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat

thereof. And Jehovah had respect unto Abel and to his offering" (Genesis 4:4).

In the law of Moses, God required of the Jews that their offerings were to be the first-fruits of their fields and flocks, not the mere gleanings and leavings: "The first of the first-fruits of thy ground thou shalt bring into the house of Jehovah thy God" (Exodus 23:19); "The first-fruits of thy grain, of thy new wine, and of thine oil, and the first of the fleece of thy sheep, shalt thou give him" (Deuteronomy 18:4); "And as soon as the commandment came abroad, the children of Israel gave in abundance the first-fruits of grain, new wine, and oil, and honey, and of all the increase of the field; and the tithe of all things brought they in abundantly" (2 Chronicles 31:5).

God was to be honored by the Jews with the first-fruits of everything they received from Him; this was a law that allowed no exceptions: "Honor Jehovah with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy vats shall overflow with new wine" (Proverbs 3:9,10). Any Jew who used the first-fruits of his increase for himself and family, giving the gleanings to God, dishonored his Creator; but the Jews who remembered God first with their substance greatly honored Him, and were richly provided with the necessities of life: "barns . . . filled with plenty, etc." Even the poorest Jew with the largest family was able to give a tenth of his income to Jehovah, the first-fruits of his increase, and still provide for himself and his own.

The unfaithful steward, who fails to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness in the use of the money he has, adjusts his giving to his standard of living. He first considers the money God has blessed him with in terms of what it will purchase for his own use. Then after he secures the things he desires, and puts some money away for a "rainy day," if he has any left over, he gives it to God. Needless to say, he is an illiberal giver. His attitude toward God is most insulting. He has given Him the gleanings of his income, treating Him as the farmer does his hogs in giving them the scraps from his table. His fear of not having the things he needs if he were to give God the first-fruits of his income is due to his lack of faith in God, who has promised to give His children all the things they need when they put Him first in their hearts and lives (Proverbs 3:7; Matthew 6:33; Acts 20:35; 2 Corinthians 9:6,8-11).

The faithful steward adjusts his standard of living to his giving; in the use of his money, God comes *first* and he comes *second*. He is aware of his right to use part of the money God has entrusted in his care to meet his personal needs, but he also well realizes that he does not have the right to put himself before God. He has no worry or fear concerning what he shall eat, drink, wear, etc. because he knows that God will provide for his every need, adding to him all the necessities of life,



when he seeks first His kingdom and His righteousness. Carefully read Matthew 6:25-34.

*To be perfectly honest, does your contribution express seeking first God's kingdom and His righteousness in the stewardship of your material means, with the firm, unwavering confidence that God will take care of you?*

### ***Does It Express Love for God and Men?***

No Christian truly loves God and men who is illiberal in his contribution. Concerning the responsibility of Christians to give liberally and sacrificially of their material means, Paul said, "proving . . . the sincerity also of your love" (2 Corinthians 8:8). How do Christians prove the sincerity of their love for God and men? By sacrificial giving, for we always sacrifice for those whom we love. In truth, the principle of sacrifice applies to every phase of Christian stewardship. Jesus declared, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). The loving Christian denies himself, sacrifices, in giving the Lord of his time, his energies, his money, his abilities—of his entirety. The illiberal giver, who is an unloving Christian, refuses to deny himself. He is reluctant to turn loose of his money in support of the Lord's work because he is unwilling to forego certain things it will secure for himself, or because he prefers the devilish pleasure of the miserly possession of money rather than the wholesome delight of devoting it to the Lord's work. What little he gives involves no sacrifice, for it represents the superfluity, gleanings, of his income.

God does not approve any contribution made to Him that does not have in it the element of sacrifice. That this is a valid conclusion is implied in the narrative recorded in Luke 21:1-4, "And he looked up, and saw the rich men that were casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites. And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, This poor widow cast in more than they all: for all these did of their superfluity cast in unto the gifts; but she of her want did cast in all the living that she had." Commenting on this passage, David Brown wrote, "Christ's standard of commendable offering is not our superfluity, but our deficiency—not what will never be missed, but what costs us some real sacrifice, and just in proportion to the relative amount of that sacrifice."

The sacrificial contribution of the poverty-stricken Macedonian saints is a striking example of the kind of giving that God approves: "Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God which hath been given in the churches of Macedonia; how that in much proof of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For according to their power, I bear witness, yea and beyond their own power, they gave of their own accord" (2 Corinthians 8:1-3).

Sacrificial, liberal giving is not just a duty but a privilege when we

truly love God and men. David, recounting the liberality of the Jews when they brought gifts to the temple, used the expression “offered willingly,” or its equivalent, six times in the twenty-ninth chapter of first Chronicles. Evidently, such willing, sacrificial giving was motivated by love. God does not want our gifts unless they are given willingly and joyfully because He does not want anything from us that is not motivated by love (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

“. . . not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7). The Greek word for “cheerful” is *hilaros*, literally meaning “hilarious.” The spirit that prevails in loving, thus sacrificial, giving is that of hilarity—an exuberance of joy, a feeling of sheer delight. “Not grudgingly” means “not of grief.” Unloving Christians actually grieve over their contribution, wishing for their money back again. They give only “of necessity,” under duress and constraint, not joyfully and willingly.

*To be perfectly honest, does your contribution express love for God and men, and thus is it truly sacrificial, cheerful giving?*

### ***Does It Express Appreciation of the Gift of God and the Sacrifice of Christ?***

God’s great love for men is exemplified at its highest in the giving of the greatest of all gifts to mankind, His only begotten Son (John 3:16). Jesus willingly submitted Himself to the Father’s will in leaving heaven to come to this world to minister unto men and finally to die as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. In appealing to the Corinthians saints for liberality in their contribution, Paul said, “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Now, how can any Christian gratefully contemplate all that God and Jesus have sacrificially given and done to bless him and fail to respond in kind by sacrificial giving? No one can stand before the cross and look up into the agonized face of his Saviour, beholding the precious body wracked with pain, and be incited to any kind of giving that is not cheerful, loving, and liberal if he is truly grateful for this greatest of all expressions of sacrificial love.

*To be perfectly honest, does your contribution express appreciation of the gift of God and the sacrifice of Christ, of all that God and Christ have done and given in your behalf?*

### ***Does It Express the Spirit of Christian Fellowship?***

It is said of the first converts to Christ that they “continued stedfastly in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). The word “fellowship” here is from the Greek *koinonia*, literally meaning “a sharing in common.” When Christians come together on the first day of the week, among other things they share in common is the contribution they make of the money God has

entrusted in their care. Those who have a deep sense of Christian *koinonia*, fellowship, will not be slack in their contribution. They will assume their share of the financial obligations of the local congregation, not letting others give liberally while they give niggardly.

Paul expressly associates Christian fellowship with the giving of one's monetary means by his use of the word *koinonia* to designate the collection he took from various congregations for the poor saints at Jerusalem: "For it hath been the good pleasure of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain *contribution (koinonia)* for the poor among the saints that are at Jerusalem" (Romans 15:26); ". . . the *fellowship (koinonia)* in the ministering to the saints" (2 Corinthians 8:4); ". . . the liberality of your *contribution (koinonia)* unto them and unto all" (2 Corinthians 9:13). When we keenly and gratefully feel the tie that binds us together in Christian love and friendship, we will cheerfully and liberally do our part in fellowship with others of the local congregation to contribute for our needy brethren.

But the sad truth is that in virtually every congregation most of the contribution is made by comparatively few of the members. And in many cases those who give the most are the poorest members, and those who give the least are the richest members. It is indeed tragic that the large majority refuse to accept their share of the financial responsibilities of the local congregation. They are free loaders, whose lack of the spirit of Christian fellowship plainly reveals their lack of love for their brothers and sisters in Christ.

*To be perfectly honest, does your contribution express the spirit of Christian fellowship, the cheerful, unselfish acceptance of your part in meeting the financial responsibilities of the local congregation?*

### Questions

1. What is the valid assumption on which faithful Christian stewardship is based? Discuss thoroughly.
2. Discuss the axiom that personal consecration must precede pocketbook consecration.
3. Discuss the principle given by Jesus in Matthew 6:33 in relation to the Christian's obligation to remember God first in the use of the money entrusted in his care.
4. What is the connection between love for God and men and liberal, sacrificial giving?
5. Discuss 2 Corinthians 9:7.
6. What is the connection between appreciation of the gift of God and the sacrifice of Christ and liberal, sacrificial giving?
7. What is the meaning of the word "fellowship" from the Greek *koinonia*? Why do those who have a deep sense of Christian *koinonia*, fellowship, do their part in meeting the financial responsibilities of the local congregation?

## THE CONTRIBUTION (2)

### *Does It Express the State of Your Prosperity?*

In 1 Corinthians 16:2 the apostle Paul deals in principle with the extent of the Christian's contribution, "*as he may prosper.*" We cannot determine from this verse alone how much we are to give out of any particular sum of money we have received, but we are taught that the extent of our giving is to be regulated by the extent of our prosperity. Certainly, the more a person receives, the more he is expected to give, and vice versa. Yet it is possible for one to increase his giving with an increase in his income without giving liberally.

All Christians, even though many do not practice their conviction in the matter, will surely agree that liberal giving is in keeping with the spirit of Christ. But just what is liberal giving? Are we to suppose that each Christian is to determine by his own wisdom and understanding what will be liberal giving on his part? For example, if one gives a mere dime out of a hundred dollars income, and considers this contribution a liberal one, does God accept his gift as being liberal?

Paul declared in 2 Corinthians 9:6, "But this I say, he that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." This passage teaches an important truth concerning which no Christian can afford to be ignorant: the extent of man's giving determines the extent of his blessings; but it does not define the difference between liberal and illiberal giving. It is impossible to determine by this passage alone when a person sows bountifully and when he sows sparingly in his giving. If the Lord blesses me with fifty dollars, for instance, just how much should I give of this sum in order to sow bountifully? Ten cents? Twenty cents? One dollar? Five dollars? Ten dollars? It cannot be proved by 1 Corinthians 9:6 that a mere dime from fifty dollars, or from a million dollars, would not be a bountiful contribution.

Another significant truth concerning the Christian's contribution is expressed in 2 Corinthians 9:7, "Let each man do according as he hath purposed in his heart . . ." This passage teaches that acceptable giving must result from purpose, or plan. The Christian who attends the Lord's day worship without having planned and purposed in his heart the amount he will contribute violates the law of God and will hardly be in the proper frame of mind to give liberally. But just what proportion of his income should the Christian purpose in his heart to give to the Lord? One might purpose to give a certain sum of money, fulfilling the latter of 2 Corinthians 9:7, and yet, when he actually gives it, fall far short of making a liberal, sacrificial contribution.

It is readily conceded that the law of God pertaining to the Christian's

stewardship in giving is a matter of his responsibility under the New Testament and not under the Old Testament. However, we can best appreciate and understand the extent of the Christian's giving in keeping with the spirit of gospel liberality when we compare it to the Jew's responsibility to give under the Old Testament. Cf. Romans 15:4.

The basic law of giving presented to the Jews in the law of Moses was the tithe, or one-tenth. This was by no means all that the faithful Jews gave. Indeed, some Bible scholars have concluded on the basis of strong evidence that the average Jew gave over half of his income to Jehovah. The tithe, however, was the focal point, the core, of the Jews' program of giving, just as our laying by in store on the first day of the week is the core of our giving, or the use of our money in good works.

The following passages are the principal references to the law of tithing: "And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is Jehovah's: it is holy unto Jehovah. And if a man will redeem aught of his tithe, he shall add unto it the fifth part thereof. And all the tithe of the herd or the flock, whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto Jehovah. He shall not search whether it be good or bad, neither shall he change it: and if he change it at all, then both it and that for which it is changed shall be holy; it shall not be redeemed" (Leviticus 27:30-33); "And unto the children of Levi, behold, I have given all the tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service which they serve, even the service of the tent of meeting. . . . Moreover thou shalt speak unto the Levites, and say unto them, When ye take of the children of Israel the tithe which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then ye shall offer up a heave-offering of it for Jehovah, a tithe of the tithe" (Numbers 18:21,26); "Will a man rob God? yet ye rob me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse; for ye rob me, even this whole nation. Bring ye the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house, and prove me now herewith, saith Jehovah of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Malachi 3:8-10).

The foregoing references reveal the following basic facts concerning the law of tithing: 1. Every Jew—rich or poor, young or old, married or unmarried, the man with a large family as well as the man with a small family—was bound by the law of God to give a tenth of his income to Jehovah. 2. The tithe, or tenth, was to be used for the care of the Levites, as recompense for their labors in the tabernacle service. It was not a tax for secular public services; it was to be used entirely for the Levites, the Jewish ministers of religion, and their families. 3. The Levites were not exempted from the law of tithing, even though they received the tithe given by the rest of the Jews. They were to give "a tithe of the tithe" as a heave-offering to Jehovah. 4. The Jews who failed to give the tithe were designated as robbers of God, and they were consequently cursed.

But those who faithfully brought their tithes to Jehovah received abundant blessings from Him.

It is true that the New Testament does not enjoin the tithe per se on the followers of Christ. But when we realize that the responsibility the New Testament enjoins upon the church is far weightier than that which the Old Testament enjoined upon the Jews, we will find it impossible to conclude that the Christian can please God by giving less than a tenth of his income in laying by in store on the first day of the week. Never did God demand that the Jews go into all the world to preach Judaism to the whole creation, for the law of Moses, the Old Testament, was given solely for the benefit of fleshly Israel. But through Christ God has given the church the command, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned" (Mark 16:15,16). And with the preaching of the gospel to the whole creation must go the shining light of good works to influence men to accept the gospel.

The tenth given by the Jews was used for the maintenance of a religious ministry that was to serve only one nation out of the many peoples of the world, but the Christians' giving is to support a religious ministry that is to bring glad tidings and the influence of good works to every accountable person on the earth. How utterly ridiculous it is to conclude that the faithful Christian can please God by giving less for the support of a world-wide ministry than the faithful Jew gave for the support of a ministry limited to one small segment of the world's population!

Observe 1 Corinthians 9:13,14, "Know ye not that they that minister about sacred things eat of the things of the temple, and they that wait upon the altar have their portion with the altar? Even so did the Lord ordain that they that proclaim the gospel should live of the gospel." A tenth of every faithful Jew's income was given for the support of those to whom Paul refers in the first part of this quotation, the Levites. Is it logical to conclude that the Lord would "ordain that they that proclaim the gospel," having a far greater responsibility than the Levites, should be supported by less than a tenth of the faithful Christian's income?

Surely, no Christian, living under the New Testament, can give proportionately less than even the poorest faithful Jew, living under the Old Testament, gave; indeed, he should strive to give much more than a tenth, reaching out to the uttermost limit of his ability to give as he sacrifices for the sake of his blessed Master.

*To be perfectly honest, does your contribution express the state of your prosperity; are you striving to give proportionately more than was given by every faithful Jew who lived under law of Moses?*

### **Covetousness**

In our discussion of the contribution, we must not overlook the antithesis of the spirit of liberal giving, which is *covetousness*. This word is

from the Greek *pleonexia*, meaning "avarice, greediness, desire to possess that which belongs to another, desire to take more than one's share." It is evident that members of the church who fail to lay by in store on the first day of the week what rightfully should be given to the Lord are covetous, for they are greedy, avaricious individuals.

Paul said, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil: which some reaching after have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Timothy 6:10). The apostle does not say that money itself is evil, for money does not have a moral quality; but he does insist that the love of money—the avaricious, greedy desire for its possession—is a source of every kind of evil.

From the earliest stage of accountability to the grave, man finds himself constantly tempted by the inordinate desire to appropriate money for his selfish use. To protect the child of God from this temptation, the divine word gives strong, clear warning concerning the sin of covetousness. Jesus said, "Take heed, and keep yourselves from all covetousness . . ." (Luke 12:15). Surely, this warning is not only meant to be heeded by those who are greedy for the possessions of their fellow men, but also by covetous persons who desire to use for themselves what rightfully should be given in the service of God.

Covetousness in the form of illiberal giving is especially dangerous to the soul because of the insidiousness of its effects. Unlike such plainly evident sins as drunkenness, murder, and stealing, covetousness can quite easily be covered by a cloak of piety and sanctimoniousness. Think of the stingy, selfish, penurious, close-fisted members of the church who are considered by their brethren as faithful Christians, even as "pillars" of the church! Who ever heard of a known drunkard, murderer, or thief who was considered by any one as a faithful follower of Christ?

So subtle and insidious are the effects and influence of covetousness that most of those in the church who are afflicted by this sin do not realize its presence. They think of themselves as *nice* people, loyal members of the church, because they do not get drunk, steal, murder, commit adultery, etc. Hence it is far more difficult to get them to change their wicked condition and to seek out the Lord's forgiveness than those who are guilty of overt sins of carnality. Time and time again we have beheld erring children of God who were guilty of plainly evident sins of the flesh, such as drunkenness, plainly acknowledge their faults with tears of remorse and shame; but rarely, if ever, have we heard an illiberal giver, guilty of covetousness, admit his sin, either privately or publicly.

Oh, could we but penetrate the shell of self-righteousness covering the covetous man who fails to give liberally of his money to the Lord and deeply impress on his mind the terrible fact that he is more unlike Christ than any other person in sin! The very core of Christianity, the gospel system, is the spirit of liberal giving: God *giving* His only begotten Son

and the Son *giving* Himself as a ransom for the human race. How can anyone be Godlike and Christlike who fails to give liberally to help those for whom Christ died?

Indeed, the illiberal, covetous man actually denies the living God by substituting filthy lucre for Him as the object of his devotion. “. . . covetous man, who is an idolater” (Ephesians 5:5); “. . . covetousness, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5). Covetousness is the negation of spiritual worship, the worshiping of the created rather than the Creator. It is the service of mammon; hence it is the rejection of the service of God. Jesus said, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24).

David, speaking of the worship of idols, said, “They that make them shall be like unto them; yea, every one that trusteth in them” (Psalms 115:8). William M. Weekley offers the following comment on this passage: “The law of idolatry is assimilation. The worshiper becomes like to the object adored. If that object is a brute beast, then he becomes brutal; if it be an image of wood or stone or iron, he becomes as cold and insensible to the cries of men about him as the idol he worships. The transformation is ever toward what we regard as ideal. Wealth unwisely used and loved becomes a kind of metallic coffin, in which are buried the purer affections and loftier ambitions of the soul.”

Illiberal givers, those who are covetous concerning money, are subjected to the constant, relentless debasement and destruction of their spiritual beings, as they partake of the very essence of the cold, indifferent idol which they worship. As B. E. Bawcom expressed it, “Covetousness is like the overly grown cancer cell that grows and begins to feed on other cells unto its own final and total destruction.”

But liberal givers, who contribute sacrificially and lovingly of their material means in the worship of the true and living God, take on the very nature of the object of their devotion. They become godlike, like God: “. . . partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust” (2 Peter 1:4).

The most sobering thought of all concerning covetousness is that an awful retribution follows in the wake of this sin, for the scriptures plainly declare that the covetous person cannot inherit the eternal kingdom, but will finally bring upon himself the wrath of God: “For this ye know of a surety, that no fornicator, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no man deceive you with empty words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 5:5,6).

Jesus warned against covetousness when he taught, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves trea-



asures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also" (Matthew 6:19-21). The covetous man's vision is limited to this life; his treasures are earthly and therefore subject to decay, as transitory as the physical world. He fails to give liberally in support of the Lord's work, which is eternal in its aspect; hence he has no treasures in heaven to enjoy when this life is over. The faithful Christian, liberal in his giving, is laying up in store for himself treasures in heaven, where his heart is. Let rust and decay do what they will to the physical things about him, he has nothing to fear; for his heavenly treasures are safe and sound, to be enjoyed by him throughout all eternity when life's brief span on earth is over.

### Questions

1. Discuss I Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 9:6,7.
2. What are the basic facts revealed in the Old Testament concerning the law of tithing?
3. Even though the New Testament does not enjoin the tithe per se on the followers of Christ, why should they give proportionately more than every faithful Jew gave, carefully noting Mark 16:15,16 and I Corinthians 9:13,14?
4. Define the word "covetousness"? How does this definition apply to the person who is illiberal in his contribution?
5. What is meant by the statement, "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil"?
6. Why is it so difficult for illiberal Christians to realize that they are covetous?
7. Discuss covetousness as idolatry.
8. What is the awful retribution that follows in the wake of covetousness?
9. Carefully read and discuss Luke 12:16-21, the parable of the rich fool.
10. What warning does Jesus give concerning covetousness in Matthew 6:19,21?

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