

Doing Good

Galatians 6:9-10

You have often heard me say that one of the great dangers of preaching in our day is what is commonly called moralism. Although it isn't a perfect definition of the problem Paul was facing in the Galatian churches, moralism is very much akin to the errors they faced way back then. Moralism is another gospel, a false gospel. And Paul didn't mince his words when he wrote,

Gal. 1:6 "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7 not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed."

And to be a bit more specific about the Galatian problem, remember Paul's words in,

Gal. 3:1 "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. 2 Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh."

"Being perfected by the flesh." That is very similar to modern-day moralism. The idea of moralism is something like this, that your own effort at goodness is what matters before God. And, therefore, the ministry of the church is designed to stimulate and motivate your own goodness. "Be good," becomes the message,

the main message. The only message. "Be a better person." "Live a good Christian life." "Follow the golden rule." "Keep the ten commandments."

And that's it. Nothing about preaching Jesus Christ and him crucified. Nothing about the gospel, which is founded on the declaration that Paul makes in,

Gal. 2:16 "...yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified."

Therefore, the message to "do good" is not the gospel. Instead, it is a gospel contrary to the one preached by the apostles. Ultimately, the message to "do good" is a denial of Jesus Christ because it denies his work of atonement, his substitutionary sacrifice as the only redeemer between God and his people.

Yet today I am preaching a sermon with the title, "Doing Good." And I am expounding and applying nothing less than the inspired words of the Apostle Paul himself, "Let us not grow weary of doing good... Let us do good to everyone..." Surely Paul is not contradicting himself. Certainly, he is not guilty of preaching a false gospel. So how are his words to be correctly and consistently explained. As he preaches the gospel, his application here is certainly to do good. So perhaps I should qualify my earlier statement. I said, the message to "do good" is not the gospel. I should say, more accurately, that the message merely to do good is not the gospel.

The danger is in the word "merely." If that's all there was to my preaching, this exhortation to do good, then we might as well

join the mainline liberal denominations all around us trying to make this world a better place by urging good people to be good. We might as well get rid of all this doctrinal stuff, all this religious stuff, all this emphasis upon Jesus and his death upon the cross, and all this emphasis upon the need for the forgiveness of our sins. No need to talk about sin at all. Just do good. Be good. For goodness' sake.

Beloved, that message, by itself, that mere message, is another gospel altogether. It is a false gospel. But, on the other hand, let me add very enthusiastically that the right and proper application of the one true gospel includes these exhortations found in our text this morning. So making applications of the true gospel in your own life is not moralism. Giving exhortations to do good in your life, as the application and natural consequence of the truth of the gospel found in God's word, is the example of the apostle. And it is to be my practice this afternoon.

Your good works will not save you. Jesus does. Your good works will not earn for you your justification, redemption, or the forgiveness of your sins. Jesus did that. Your good works will not gain you any credit or merit which you can use as the basis of your entrance into heaven. The only merit by which heaven is earned is the merit which Jesus himself accomplished, and the call of the gospel is to believe in him, to trust in him, for eternal life. That is the gospel I will preach as long as God gives me breath.

But now, this afternoon our focus is the apostolic application of that gospel,

v.9 "And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. 10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."

Let me focus our thoughts today with three questions. First,

I. WHAT IS NECESSARY FOR YOU TO DO GOOD?

Look at,

v.9

Paul is very conscious of something that is all-too-obvious, all-too-often. We get weary. The word doesn't necessarily imply lazy, but that could be included. The word actually has a literal reference to giving in to evil. It includes the idea of losing heart, even becoming a coward.

The end of verse 9 is translated, "if we do not give up," and that is related to the word for growing weary. The idea is of being exhausted. Just plain tired out. Worn out. Exhausted. Maybe because of being habitually neglectful. Maybe because it is just too much work. The point here doesn't require you to identify the cause. The result is the same. And so, in order to heed Paul's exhortation to do good,

A. You must overcome a natural weariness.

We live in a fallen world, a world that seeks to wear you out. That is the effect of the curse which God imposed upon Adam and Eve. It is the curse of the toilsome nature of labor, the curse of thorns in the garden, the curse of pain and suffering even in childbearing. We live in a fallen world, and there is, therefore, a natural tendency to become worn out. To lose heart. To give up. To grow weary.

You and I all understand it very well. We know the inclination. We know the experience. We know what it is to be worn out, even to lose heart. Paul's point is that you have to overcome that tendency.

The writer of Hebrews uses the same language with reference to our struggle against sin,

Heb. 12:3 “Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. 4 In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.”

But I think there is something else involved in all of this, something else that is necessary. We have to choose to do what the Bible calls “good.” That phrase is used twice here, in verse 9 and again in verse 10. There are two different Greek words use, which together emphasize the moral definition of goodness. And it is a moral term. In an absolute sense, we know that only God is good. When Jesus himself was addressed as a “good teacher,” he responded rather abruptly, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.’”

Goodness is an attribute of God. It is a definition of God. Thus to do good is to imitate God. To do good is to do what is judged and determined by God to be good, a moral good. And so for you to do good, for you not to grow weary of doing good,

B. You must accept a moral responsibility.

That is, of course, what it means to be created in God’s image. We have moral responsibility. We make more choices. Every day. All the time. We choose to do good. We choose to do evil. And so the call of Paul’s exhortation here is not moralism. It is not a call to earn your salvation nor is it a reduction of the gospel to a mere moral lesson. Rather, as an application of that gospel by which you are saved by grace through faith, you are called upon to accept a moral responsibility.

God has prescribed and defined much of this goodness in our relationships with one another. Certainly that begins with the ten

commandments, the second table of the law especially. So if you want to do good to others, honor and respect all levels of authority which God has established. Honor the life and health of others, so that you would never cause them harm, in your actions, words or even thoughts. Keep your thoughts pure and your actions chaste, especially in the realm of sexuality. Honor the sanctity of the possessions of others, don’t steal. Honor their good name and the honor of their reputation, so don’t lie, slander, gossip or speak ill of them or to them. And don’t covet. Don’t relate to one another with jealousy and any form of interpersonal bitterness.

It’s not rocket science, as they say, this business of goodness! With your words, do others good. With your actions, do them good. That is your moral responsibility given to you as creatures made in the image of God, and the ability to do just that is given to you as a fruit of God’s work of salvation in your life, your regeneration. You are made new, renewed in the image of God. And enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness.

Thus the exhortation of the apostle, to accept this moral responsibility and overcome a very natural and understandable weariness. Let me give you some motivation in that regard. The second question of the morning’s sermon.

II. WHY SHOULD YOU DO GOOD?

Let me mention first something that might get overlooked in the casual reading of this text. In the grammar, it doesn’t get much attention or emphasis, but let me draw out that phrase in verse 10, “as we have opportunity.”

Let me very admittedly add in something that the Bible teaches elsewhere, namely that God “works all things according

to the counsel of his will.” God has a purpose, an eternal purpose, an eternal decree, we call it, such that we believe that “God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass.”

So with that understanding, let me turn this phrase in verse 10 around a bit, such that the words “as we have opportunity” are understood to mean,

A. God gives us opportunity.

That really is to say the same thing. So the reason why you should do good is because God gives you opportunity to do good! And you shouldn't run or hide from that responsibility.

There is also a recognition that your moral responsibility to do good is restricted to your opportunity. So there is no place for a messiah-complex, in which you think you could save the world yourself if you would just try a little harder. There is no justification for an obsessive-compulsive tendency in which you try to do everything yourself, and feel guilty because there are just some things you can't do. There is no place for the self-absorbed feelings of uselessness or worthlessness that come to those who don't seem to have as much opportunity as they would like.

No, our responsibility is defined by the opportunity God gives, and to express that again as a positive motivation, God does give us opportunity. So look for it? Look for the opportunity that God gives you to do good to others. Look within the parameters of your own life for those opportunities that God has arranged by his providence to do good, knowing and believing that he does, in fact, give you opportunity.

So don't grow weary of doing good, do not give up, because

God does give opportunity. And,

B. God rewards our good.

That's the second motivation. And that's important, because many people today who rightly want to protect the gospel from any intrusion of works-righteousness and who want to eliminate any sense of merit in our own goodness, will refuse to acknowledge any conditional sense of God rewarding our good.

I am not saying that you earn your salvation. Perish the thought. Jesus earned your salvation. It is not that you preserve your status as a child of God by doing good, for your assurance and confidence must be in God's gracious love for you and not in the performance of your own good works.

But there is still a measure of conditional blessing to those who do good! Just as there is with my children. My children could never do anything so bad that it would jeopardize their standing or their position as my children. I would never disown them. They don't have to earn my love, for they have it unconditionally. I am their father, and it was on that basis that I chose to love them from the very first moment of their existence. But as their father, there were times when I had to discipline them in my fatherly displeasure. And there were times I rewarded them and honored them for their obedience or their honor and respect of me.

And even as Paul emphasized in bringing the fifth commandment over into the context of the New Covenant, he wrote,

Eph. 6:1 “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”

There is a blessing attached to our obedience, “that it may go well with you...” The reality is that God rewards our God. Or as Paul puts it,

v.9 “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.”

Isn't that the same idea we saw last time,

v.7 “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.”

There is a great illustration of this with reference to giving tithes and offering, found in,

2 Cor. 9:6 “The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. 9 As it is written, “He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” 10 He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. 11 You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God...[And the passage ends] 15 Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift.”

It is the same principle as declared by Malachi,

Mal. 3:10 “Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. 11 I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear,

says the Lord of hosts. 12 Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the Lord of hosts.”

Beloved, God rewards our good. Ultimately, he still gets all the praise and the thanksgiving from you, but don't let that obscure this obvious biblical point. God rewards our good. That principle is perhaps never more clear than in,

Ps. 1:1 “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; 2 but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. 3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.”

One final question then. What is necessary for you to do good? Why should you do good? And thirdly,

III. TO WHOM SHOULD YOU DO GOOD?

There is an easy answer to that question, isn't there?

A. To everyone.

When God said to “love your neighbor as yourself,” he didn't mean by that, “Let me pick out my neighbors so that I can be mean to everyone else!

I couldn't possibly illustrate this better than Jesus! Remember when a certain lawyer tested Jesus with the question, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus responded with reference to the law, in order to convict the man of his own sinful and complete inability to earn eternal life.

Luke 10:27 “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your

mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.'”

Luke 10:29 “But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

If I could just figure out whom I have to love, and then if I go do it, I’ll have eternal life. Then came the parable of the Good Samaritan,

Luke 10:36 “Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” 37 He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.

v.10 “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone...”

The commandment is, “Go and be a neighbor,” not, “Who is my neighbor? That’s the requirement of the law. “Go and be a neighbor.” That is the application of the gospel for the lives of God’s people. You who are justified by faith, you who are adopted to be the children of God, go and do good to all men. Don’t grow weary. Don’t lose heart. Love you neighbor as yourself! Die to yourself, and give to your neighbor that attention you had previously reserved for yourself.

But Paul has one more important point for us in this text. To whom should you do good? To everyone, yes.

v.10 “...and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

There is a priority established. A priority among Christians. But I think, even more, a priority for your own church family. So do good,

B. Especially to your church family.

And that is how we describe it, a family. Paul identifies the “household of faith,” and uses that word that has as its reference point a normal ordinary household. A family. We still use the word the very same way today. It is just that the tie that binds the members of the household is not blood, as we would say for an ordinary family. Rather, faith. And in a real sense, faith is to be thicker even than blood!

I hold family in high regard, both in general terms and personally. On this earth, there is nothing more valuable to me than my own family. Nothing is more guarded, nor more highly prized.

And the church is to be a family. In every sense of the word.

Paul uses similar language of a household in Ephesians, and adds the image of a building, a house.

Eph. 2:19 “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”

So the identity of our church is important, which is one of the reasons why church membership is so important. When the New Testament refers to the church, including here in Galatians, the reference is to a local congregation. A local body. A well-defined family.

So here we are. A family. And our text this morning makes an important point, a point of priority. The priority of the family. The priority of our own household. The priority of this family in all of

your lives. We are brothers and sisters. And we are joined together in a way that, ordinarily, should be inseparable.

And that should be made evident by our willingness to do good, especially to one another. So don't grow weary of doing good. Do not give up. As you have opportunity, do good to one another within this family we call the Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church.

Within the church, you can't pick and choose those to whom you will do good. You can't pick and choose some whom you like, some with whom you are more comfortable to the exclusion of others. You can't choose not to do good to others. Within the body of the church, you can't choose who your neighbor is. You are to be that neighbor, especially to those who are of the household of faith, especially to those who are members of the church.

With one final encouragement. One final motivating exhortation.

1 Cor. 15:58 "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."

So,

v.9 "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."