

Be a Do Gooder • Hebrews 13:16

I watched from the sidelines that Saturday morning as a group of sixth grade boys walked off the football field. Number 14 caught my attention as he pressed through his teammates seeming to ignore their comments and friendly pats. He was obviously looking for someone in the crowd of adults who were nearly twice his size. Then he pulled off his football helmet, put on a smile and quickened his pace. He had found the one he was looking for!

“Dad! Dad!” he said. “Did you see me? Did you see the play I made?”

“Yeah, I saw you son. You were great! I was so proud of you!”

There could have been 10,000 people at that Saturday morning football game and 9,999 of them would not have mattered. He was playing to please just one person . . . his dad.

How much like that boy we are. As Christians we know that the most important applause of all is not the applause of humans but the pleasure of our heavenly Father. Therefore, our ears perk up and our attention is fixed when we come to a Bible verse that tells us how we can please the Father we love.

Hebrews 13:16 tells us, “. . . do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.” Actually, Hebrews 13:16 is a continuation of verse 15 which says, “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God

a sacrificed of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name.” We begin by praising God and confessing his name, but God doesn’t want us to stop there. He wants us to put action to our words—not just lips of praise but also hands and feet that do good.

In our last study we committed to please God with our praise. In this study we are challenged to please God with our practice. This practical side of the formula for pleasing God comes in two exhortations. The first is to do good and the second is to share.

We are not to do good to gain salvation or to prove that we have earned or deserve the favor of God. No, doing good is something quite different from that. “Doing good” actually is often misunderstood. In fact, multitudes of uninformed people think that doing good is the way to get to heaven. They somehow think that heaven is won on a merit/demerit system as though, at the gates of heaven, St. Peter checks his computer to call up our lifetime score: 10,396,432 bad deeds as opposed to 10,396,433 good deeds. “You’re in, by the skin of your good deeds!” Tragically, many people really believe that they have proved their right to salvation by doing good. Because of their good works they think they have earned their right to heaven.

Let me tell you where I have most often heard this belief expressed. It is after the death of a friend or relative. Then the living say, “Oh, I’m sure he’s in heaven. He was such a good person.” Or, “God would have to let her into heaven after all the good things she did for others on earth.”

That almost seems to make sense except that the determiner of access to heaven is God and God has clearly stated that good works do not

make for salvation! In Ephesians 2:8-9 it says, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” All the good works that all

of us could ever accumulate would never possibly be enough to buy us a place in heaven.

If doing good is not for salvation and not to prove to God that we are good enough to get into heaven, then why do good? Since salvation is by grace through faith, we’re all set. If salvation is a gift, why work? Since heaven is guaranteed, let’s just forget about doing good.

No, that’s not the way we should see this. We should do good because, as Christians, we want to please God. After all God has done to save us, we want to thank him. Since God has given us

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everything, we want to please him. The God we want to please tells us we don't need to do good for salvation but we do need to do good to please him, ". . . do not forget to do good."

Christians—those who have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ—do good, but not to go to heaven and not even primarily to benefit those who are the recipients of those good works. Christians do good to please God.

So, what good are we doing to please God? If a print-out were made of the good we do, what would be on the list?

We could include on our list giving simple help. Recently while driving home we passed someone near our house who had run out of gas. The easiest thing would have been to simply go home and forget about it. It was a fairly busy area and it wouldn't have been hard to get help. Instead, we stopped and said we'd get some gas for him. That was a simple thing. It was doing good . . . not primarily for him, but primarily for God. It was doing what pleases God.

Maybe it's babysitting for a mom who can't afford to hire a babysitter. It may be driving people to church or to a doctor's appointment who don't drive or don't have a car. Or perhaps it's befriending newcomers at school or at work or at church.

Another way to do good is by shaping lives through teaching Sunday school, working in the nursery or helping out single parent families. Men have a significant ministry to children who do not have a father in the home by teaching the skills they have or playing sports with a child. A woman can help a single father by helping to care for his house, shopping for clothes or spending time with his daughter and shaping her life.

In James 1:27 we learn, "*Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress . . .*" God wants us to care for and love those whom others don't care about.

To do good is to impact society. In the first century Mediterranean world there were a lot of orphans and widows and life was tough. The same is true in our society today. There are a lot of single parent households and a lot of children who don't have a father or a mother in their homes. If James were writing that verse today the terminology

might be a little different but the application as to what is pure and faultless religion is pretty much the same.

Have you ever thought about how you might impact society? At a conference I heard a Presbyterian pastor from Cincinnati tell about his battle against pornography. He talked about the correlation between pornography and rape, incest and child molestation. He had asked God to raise up in that particular church and community people who would be able to do something about it. The church decided to take it on as a ministry and within fourteen months there are no adult book stores, no x-rated movies and the Playboy channel was dropped from cable television.

He did good. Those around him did good. They impacted society. Those people gave their lives to change other people by doing good to please God.

When I was growing up my Mother had an interesting expression that I'm sure I heard her say ten thousand times. Whenever anyone she didn't know would do something she thought was good she would say, "He must be a Christian." I'm not sure her judgments were always correct but it was certainly fun to listen to her evaluations. The driver who courteously cleared the way, the cashier who returned an overpayment, the police officer who demonstrated special courtesy—of all these people my mother would say, "That person must be a Christian."

May that be said about you and about me and may it be said often. May the words we speak, the courtesies we extend, the kindnesses that we do—whether little or big—cause others to say about us, "That person must be a Christian!"

However, far more than impressing other people, may the good we do be pleasing to God. ". . . do not forget to do good . . . for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

Exhortation Number One is to do good. Exhortation Number Two is to share what we have. Hebrews 13:6 tells us, ". . . do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased." That begs the question: What can you share but what you have? Isn't that a rather strange statement to put in there?

Apparently God is answering a rather common excuse that is almost universal to humanity. We often say that we cannot because we have not. We say, “I can’t give to the poor because I’m running behind financially.” “I can’t work with kids because I just don’t have the time. My schedule is so busy.” “I can’t help others because I don’t have the strength.” “I can’t share because I don’t have.”

God never asks us to share what we don’t have. He doesn’t hold us accountable for what we cannot do. God never asks us to give money we don’t have. God never asks us to give time that isn’t available. God never asks us to share what we don’t have. God tells us to share what we do have because such sacrifices please God.

Here we have entered the realm of reality. It’s not what we lack but what we have. God is pleased when we share what we have. For some people it means sharing very little because we have very little; for others it means sharing much because we have much. It is simply based upon what we have. Do you have only a few cents, a couple of minutes, a little bit of energy, a handful of crumbs or a limited skill? Share what you have! Or, do you have tens of thousands of dollars, discretionary time, a lovely home, a multitude of talents, lots of connections, good health and abundance of blessings? Share what you have! If you have a lot, share a lot. If you have little, share a little.

The Greek word used here in the New Testament is “koinonia”. It is the word that is translated “share.” It means sharing money, sharing friendship, sharing fellowship. The root idea is sharing things in common. It’s the idea that “what is mine is yours.”

What do you think you might share? Perhaps you might share your faith by telling co-workers about Jesus Christ. Share your home by entertaining those who need a friend. Share your money by giving to feed those who are starving in Africa or the dislocated in Central America. Share your

education by teaching inner city children how to read or speak English or do other skills you tend to take for granted. You could make all the difference in someone’s life. Share your love by visiting people in a nursing home who have been forgotten by relatives or who have no relatives left. Share your knowledge by teaching a Sunday school class.

Do you feel that would be a sacrifice? Perhaps it would. But God is worth it! He is the one who gave us all we have and he is pleased when we share what he has given to us.

How would you rate yourself? Are you a keeper or a sharer? Would you rather please yourself or would you rather please God?

Once, very long ago, Jesus told the story of an unlikely man who pleased God. The story is found in Luke 10:30-36:

“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity

on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

Who do you think it was? Better yet, let’s rephrase Jesus’ question. Which of these three would you be? Would you be the priest and the Levite

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who did no good and did not share what they had?
Or would you be the unlikely Samaritan who fulfilled the mandate that is given to us in the Bible?

When God gives us such opportunities as we travel our road of life, may we be modern Samaritans who *“do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”*

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