

Doing Good

by: Ronald L. Dart

There are some ideas in the Bible that are so simple and so obvious that it is staggering that human beings have to ask for an explanation, but we do some times. I want to give you a classic example of this. It is found in Matthew chapter 5 and verse 43. This is from the Sermon on the Mount and it is good old basic Christianity. Jesus said: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' {44} "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless them who curse you, do good to them who hate you, and pray for them who spitefully use you and persecute you."

Now of all the teachings of Jesus, I can't think of any that is more neglected than this little short passage, of one that has been overlooked, passed over, forgotten, ignored and one which could probably do more good for us, our lives and our communities than any other thing that Jesus said.

But you know, I want to lay aside for a moment, the hard part of this and that is doing good to your enemies, blessing those who persecute you. That's hard, that's really hard. What I want you to focus on, right in the middle of this statement is two short, one syllable words, that are so simple, so easy, that they are among the most overlooked things that God ever said to man in the Old or the New Testament.

Do Good

They are the words DO GOOD. Now how hard is this? You know, I can just hear somebody in Jesus' audience saying "Well, uh, master, what does it mean to do good?" They asked Him questions like that all the time, about things that He said, that were just this simple. "Lord, what do you mean, do good?" I can see Jesus rolling his eyes to heaven and wondering, just how long He is going to have to bear with these people to get them to understand what He is trying to say. What would He say? I think He would be tempted to say "Do you mean to tell Me that you don't have a clue what it means to do good?"

Well, mercifully, no one on this occasion ask Him that. They probably focused so much on the fact of the struggle of what they were going to have to do in doing good to their enemies that they didn't quite get to thinking about what it meant when He said "Do Good."

No End To It

Let's look at Psalm 37:1 "Don't worry yourself about evildoers, neither be envious against the workers of iniquity. {2} They shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. {3} Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shall you dwell in the land, and verily you shall be fed."

Isn't this simple. Trust God and 'do good'. But what does He mean by this? I want to tell you something. One of the reasons we slide over this commandment and don't think a lot about it, is because it's scary. Do you know what's scary about this commandment? There is no end to it. When He tells me to rest on the seventh day I can do that. I know when the Sabbath Day begins and I know when it ends, and trust me, I know how to rest. I can sleep late, I can get up and do nothing, I can lie around on the couch. I am good at resting.

However, to 'do good', there is no end to that. After the Sabbath is over I can go back to work, however, when I have done good, there is simply more good to be done. It never ends. It goes on.

In Ecclesiastes 3:10, that famous section of the Bible, in which it says that there is a time for everything under the sun, Solomon says in verse 10: "I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it. {11} He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he has set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God makes from the beginning to the end."

In other words, we have it within us to look for it. We realize it's out there and yet we can't grapple with it. And he says {12} "I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life."

You are not going to solve all of the great mysteries of the universe. You're not going to rationalize all the things that God knows. You're not going to sort out all the things that God has done, can do, will do. Just settle down and learn how to rejoice and to 'do good' in your life.

What Do I Have To Do To Do Good?

Let me bring you to the New Testament to Hebrews 13:15 "By Jesus therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. {16} "But don't forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

You can praise and pray to God all day long, and He says that this is great but I want you to remember one thing, don't forget to 'do good and to share'. The Greek word for 'share' is *koinonia* (G2842), the word from which we get 'fellowship'. It has to do with communion, with sharing, with togetherness. This is not only a matter of giving to one another, not only

of our substance, but also of our time and our life, and our heart and our attention. Basically what he is saying, is get out of yourself, share yourself with others, get out there and 'do some good' in the world.

Maintaining Good Works

John the apostle writes in 3 John 1: 11 "Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God." He doesn't know anything about God, has no concept of Him.

What is this all about?

Titus in chapter 3 gets us a little closer to home. Chapter 3 verse eight: "This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that they who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men, {9} Get away from foolish questions, genealogies, contentions, and striving about the law; they are unprofitable and vain." They will lead you around in circles and split your church in more ways than you have members. What are you supposed to do? Be careful to maintain good works, and to 'do good'.

You know what is odd about all of this, is that so many Christian people are still to this day uncertain about what Jesus and Paul meant by maintaining and doing good works. Some people think that good works are commandment keeping. Some people think that it is holding all of the right doctrines and if I follow those doctrines then these are good works, then there are some people that think that we are saved by grace and it doesn't really matter very much what you do, and one really wonders what they think, all three categories of these people, when they read a passage like Matthew 25.

Olivet Prophecy

I want to take you to Matthew 25 which is three parables. Now the interesting thing about this, which is sometimes overlooked by people who study prophecy, they go to what they call the Olivet Prophecy and they spend a great deal of time in Matthew 24 and seem to assume that that's the Olivet Prophecy. It's not! Matthew 24 and 25 are the Olivet Prophecy.

Jesus' disciples asked Him "What shall be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age" (Matthew 24:3). Jesus went through this elaborate prophecy. He said you are going to hear about wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines and lots of bad stuff has to come. Don't worry, the end is not yet." He goes on to tell us many things.

Lots of people connect Matthew 24 with Revelation and they delight in trying to sort all the permutations of this prophecy and try to get it all diagrammed and charted on paper so that whenever it all begins to happen, they will have a chart in front of them and they can tune in

to CNN and they can follow all the events that are happening in the end time on their little chart. Don't think that for a minute. That's not going to happen.

Jesus in this prophecy said basically two things. He said, "It's not for you to know the time or the season that My Father had put in His own hand (Matthew 24:36). It is necessary for you to be ready all the time." It's an important thing for you to understand because in making this comment about maintaining readiness, what He is telling you is "You can't maintain a high level red alert readiness all the time." You have got to come to a level of readiness that you can maintain day in, day out, day in, day out, and a part of this is a simple concept, a two word phrase "Do Good." Don't do evil, do good.

Matthew 25

Now having given His disciples all of the things in Matthew 24, He comes to this section in Matthew 25. There are three parables. The parables are very different from one another. They are all very familiar to you. I am going to work my way through them and I want you to come to understand, what the common denominator is of these three parables.

The first parable in Matthew 25 is the parable of the virgins.

Parable of Ten Virgins

"The kingdom of heaven is going to be like ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. {2} Five of them were wise, and five were foolish. {3} They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: {4} They that were wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps." How hard is this? To maintain a level of readiness that we can maintain all of the time, it means that you have a lamp and you do a little bit of extra preparation in that you carry along a little cruise of oil along side your lamp so that as it burns out you will have some oil to put in it and relight it. How hard is this? It is the difference between carelessness and in being careful. It is a difference of being unprepared and being prepared and it's not some giant thing, it is not climbing Mount Everest, it is not some huge problem to solve. It is a problem of good steady common sense and readiness.

Listen to what Jesus says in verse 5: "While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept." You can't stay awake from now till the coming of Christ. There is no reason to feel bad about the fact that you're going to get some sleep along the way.

Verse 6: "And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom comes; go out to meet him. {7} Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. {8} The foolish said to the wise, Give us some of your oil; for our lamps are going out. {9} But the wise answered, saying, I'm sorry, we don't have enough for us and you: you go to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. {10} And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut."

Listen to the result of this. {11} "Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. {12} But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not." Now this is really really hard. It is really sobering because all they had was just a simple failure to maintain readiness and because they had to go and do this preparation at the last minute, they were in the wrong place at the wrong time and the door was shut and they were closed out. Jesus said that He didn't even know who they were.

These were all virgins, to begin with, they all slept and the only difference between them was the level of preparedness that they had between them.

Jesus said {13} "Watch therefore, for you do not know the day or the hour when the Lord will come." You have to be alert. You have to be prepared. This first parable is about being prepared.

Parable of the Talents

The second parable begins in Matthew 25:14 Jesus said "The kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered to them his goods. {15} To one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey." He gave each man according to his abilities. He gave them different responsibilities. He did not lay upon a man something he couldn't handle. In each case, the man was weighed and he said he could handle this. Give him this.

Verse 16: "So he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made five more talents. "He doubled his money. {17} "He that had received two, he also doubled his money. {18} But he that had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money. {19} After a long time the lord came back to those servants, and reckoned with them. {20} And he that had received five talents came and brought the other five talents, saying, Lord, you gave me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more."

Now how this actually would play out in life I don't have any idea. It would probably be totally different from one person to another. The idea is that God weighs you. He holds you in His hand and tests you. He says okay, I believe that this fellow can handle this. So He gives you a responsibility that you can handle and He expects you to do the best that you can with what He has given you.

Now, it is important to understand this, because a lot of people seem to approach the kingdom of God as though it doesn't matter what they do. You know, why should you worry about this? Christ has done it all for you. Now there is a sense in which I know that is true, I know that I couldn't forgive my sins. I know that I couldn't do these things, but at the same time, here I come up against a situation where I see clearly that certain demands are going to be made of me, commensurate with what I can do, and I am expected to perform.

Let's continue in verse 21: "His lord said to him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you responsible over big things."

You know, if you can handle the little stuff, I know you can handle the big stuff. If you are faithful here, you will be faithful there. If you are not faithful here, you will not be faithful there.

It gets down to a simple thing as saying to a man, how you handle your money, tells me how faithful you are and you can be trusted with things that are bigger than money. And believe it or not, there are things that are bigger than money.

"I will make you ruler over many things: enter into the joy of your Lord."

The guy who had two talents, it was the same story. He doubled his money, it was the same reward and the same response. No difference. He only made two, the other guy made five. They both seem to be rewarded the same because they did what they could with what they had. Both of them performed to the max. I think it's an important lesson to be learned.

It is not the same lesson as with the first parable. It is a different lesson there. There, we were talking about basic preparedness. In this parable we are talking about performance with what you have.

You Wicked and Slothful Servant

And then of course there's the poor sap, the third guy, who received one talent who came and said in Matthew 25:24: "Lord I know you're a hard man. I know you reap where you haven't sown. I know you gather where you have not scattered seed and I was afraid and I went and hid your talent in the earth and look there you have what is yours." Now he didn't lose anything.

Listen to the response in verse 26: "His lord answered and said unto him, You wicked and slothful servant." You lazy lout, which is what he was saying to this guy. "You knew this, you said you knew that I was a hard man, you know that I reap where I didn't sow. You knew that I had high standards, right? {27} "You should have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I would have gotten the time value of my money." Money has time value. This guy just thought I will just give him back what he gave me.

Now listen to the response. This is the thing that is really spooky about all of this. He says {28} "Take the talent away from him, and give it to him that has ten talents. {29} For to every one that has shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that has not shall be taken away even what he has. {30} And cast you the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Kind of sobering isn't it?

Now here, there is no time element in this prophecy at all. There is no trying to maintain preparedness for some point in time when the master comes. This second parable is about

performance, production, accomplishment. The one who doesn't accomplish does not eak his way into the kingdom of God, he is out.

In one of the parables the words are tossed in "Well Lord why take it from him and give it to him, he already has ten talents, that's not fair (Luke 19:25)." That is the implication of the question that the disciples asked. It is not fair to take the one talent from him and give it to the guy that has ten. Now that depends on what point of view you are looking at. If it is your money, that we are talking about here, are you going to leave money with a financial adviser that doesn't produce, or will you take it away from the one who doesn't produce and give it to the man who does?

It's your money and you will want to give it the person who is producing and getting results. You are not going to leave it over here with someone who will put it in a coffee can and bury it in the backyard. You're expecting better than that of your money. Right?

Here's two parables. What do they have in common? They are both about the kingdom of God. One is about being constantly prepared. The second parable is about performance.

The Third Parable

What is the third parable about?

Matthew 25:31 "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him." This parable begins with the word 'when' and it blends seamlessly into the second parable as though this one, in a way, is an explanation of the second parable.

Jesus says: "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: {32} And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats: {33} And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, and the goats on the left. {34} Then shall the King say to them on his right hand, Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world".

This is a tough piece of work here. You've got to understand this as you go through this. This Greek word 'gar' which translates as 'for' in English is like saying 'therefore' which is *causative*. In other words, we are going to do this because of what follows. Think about it. He says inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, *because*. Wouldn't you like to know what that is? If there's a cause involved in this? I've always thought that it was the grace of God, I have God's grace, I've repented, I've been baptized, forgiven and the grace of God has saved me, therefore I'm heading for the kingdom of God. I'm going there and there is nothing that can stand in my way. It is Jesus plus nothing.

Here's Jesus on the Mount of Olives, with His disciples gathered around Him, and He says "The time is going to come that I am going to come back and separate the sheep from the

goats and I am going to say to those on my right hand, {34} "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, {35} *because* I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you took me in. {36} I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick, and you visited me. I was in prison, and you came to me."

How hard is this to understand? We are to 'do good works' of providing {35} food for people who don't have anything to eat, {36} clothes for people who don't have anything to wear, coats for kids who are cold in the winter time, for people who are in jail who need encouragement of a visit or perhaps a letter coming from someone from time to time. By 'doing good works', He says, "Inherit the kingdom of God prepared for you from the foundation of the world, *because* you did these things, and they said {37} "I don't understand Lord, when did I ever see you hungry and feed you? When did we ever see you thirsty and give you a drink? {38} When did we see you as a stranger take you in? When did we see you naked and give you something to wear? {39} When did we see you sick or in prison and we came to you? The {40} King shall answer and say to you, Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it to me."

I know there is sometimes a temptation to try to explain these things away, or to spiritualize them away and try to say "Well, the drink of water is the spirit of God and the food was the word of God and to find all kinds of explanations but, you know, more often than not, the simplest and straight forward and obvious explanation here, is what Jesus seems to be saying is that you took care of and helped the disadvantaged, you did it to Me. He said *because* you did this, "Inherit the kingdom."

There is a definite fallout, isn't there, from the parable just before, because we know it is a parable, an allegory, and we know that the talents stand for something and the performance stands for something. Now we are beginning to find out what kind of performance we're talking about. We are also finding in the simplest possible way the answer to the question that some guys and some unthinking disciple might have asked Jesus, "Lord, what do you mean, do good?"

Well, here are some hard-core simple straightforward, down to earth examples of doing good. We are not through with this yet. We haven't yet discovered what all of these parables have in common. What is the common denominator of them?

Jesus went on to say in Matthew 25:41 ""Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. {42} For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, {43} I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I was naked and needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not come to me.' {44} "They answered and said, 'Lord, If I had seen you in prison I would have come.' 'Lord, If I had seen you naked I would have given you a coat.' 'Lord, If I had known you were thirsty I would have walked across the Sahara Desert to get you a drink.' He is going to say {45} 'Assuredly,

I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' {46} "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.""

I would say the stakes on this are pretty high.

This third parable is about 'doing good' works.

Common Denominator

What's the common denominator of these three parables? The common denominator is You Can Lose Out! The first one is that if you are not prepared you can lose out. The second one is that if you don't perform to the maximum you can lose out. The third one is if you don't 'do good' you can also lose out.

Now this is pretty heavy stuff. I know it makes people uncomfortable, especially if you believe in the security of the believer and I do believe in the security of believer in the sense that God will do everything in his power to bring us into his kingdom, but there's one thing that God will not do, He will not actually drag you out of your house into your car and drive you down the road to an old folks home to visit an elderly widow there who is lonely and needs someone to read the Bible to her. God is not going to do that. You're going to have to do that. You are going to have to find out who these people are and you're going to have to find ways of 'doing good' to these people. And indeed there are plenty of us in the church, who are ourselves are in trouble and need that kind of help.

Who is My Brother?

Jesus does say in this section 'My brethren'. Now what does that mean? Does it mean that we do this only for church members? Or, do we have any responsibility for somebody that is not in the church? First of all, who Jesus considers His brethren may be a little bigger and broader than you and I think. He may have people He considers His people that you and I don't know about. Don't ever forget that. How can you know who is going to be your brother next week?

How do you know that the good you do to someone who appears not to be your brother today, that that person will be your brother because of the good that you did to him.

Who is My Neighbor?

Turn back with me to a very familiar parable in Luke Chapter 10. These things are fundamental Christianity but every once in a while you have to go over them again and you have to be reminded of what they say.

Luke 10:25 "Behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and he said Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? {26} Jesus said, What is written in the law? how do you read it? {27} And he

answering said, Thou shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself. {28} And he said to him, You're right: do this, and you will live. {29} But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor?"

This is where we all have to justify ourselves. We all try to explain away our own feelings and our own reluctance. This lawyer said "Who is my neighbor?" Now the question is a simple one? I understand that I have to do good. I understand that I have to love my neighbor as myself. My question is, how far and wide does this thing reach? What do I have to do?

Jesus said in Luke 10:30 "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothes, wounded him, and left him half dead. {31} And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. {32} And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side." These were two highly respected members of the Jewish religious community.

Verse 33 "Then a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion and felt sorry for him, {34} And went over to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own animal, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him."

The Samaritans to the Jews were of the lowest ebb of society, only slightly better than the ass that he was dragging behind him with the man on it.

Verse 35: "On the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and if you spend more than this, when I come back again, I will cover the cost of the rest of it." Now Jesus asks the lawyer {36} "Which now of these three, do you think, was neighbor to him that fell among the thieves? {37} he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus to him, Go, and you do likewise."

Opportunity

Now I want to tell you what this parable says to me. It says to me that this is not a question of who I like and who I don't like. It's a question of opportunity. If you walk along a road and find a man in a ditch, this man is your neighbor. It doesn't make a difference if you ever saw him before in your life. We can't go out and save the whole world, but we should be able to make a difference from time to time.

Now here is one verse and it is Galatians 6:10 Paul writes to the Galatians and says "Therefore as we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially to them who are of the household of faith." Oh I get it now. I have a special obligation to all of the people who are brethren of the household of faith. But in saying so, I admit that I have an obligation to everybody. It is my brothers and sisters in the faith that I have a special obligation to

which does not relieve me of my obligation to the rest. This is what Jesus said. This is what Paul says. The Bible tells me so.

What is Evangelism?

Now a surprising number of people, in different places, are waking up to realize that evangelism is not merely a matter of words. Evangelism is not merely a matter of doctrine. Evangelism is not merely a matter of preaching the gospel. It is often a matter of simply 'doing good'. Those two little words, 'do good', is a warning from Jesus. It is in the Psalms, it is all through the Bible. Do good, rejoice and do good works, maintain good works. Remember the little expression to maintain good works and connected with the other parable which says you have to be able to maintain a level of readiness. It has to be a level you can maintain. You can burn yourself out if you're not careful in doing good works.

Evangelism is not words and arguments and proof texts. It has to do with the way we treat people. It means touching peoples' lives in real ways, all in the name of Jesus Christ.

I know that you and I can't save the world. There is too much pain, too much poverty, too much sickness, but if each one of us could save one person, we would have done something of cosmic significance. Just one person.

A Letter from a Sister

I got a letter a while back from a person who is our sister in the faith. She wrote and said "Dear Mr. Dart, Thank you for your response to my letter and it is sincerely appreciated. I intended to answer sooner but I have been going through a particularly difficult time. I'm sure there are many demands on your time so I will make this as brief and straightforward as possible. A visit at this time would pose a problem, following the two lung cancer surgeries, plus another for my heart and one for an ovarian tumor, in addition to some doctors blunders, and/or incompetence. I live with constant intractable pain, partially residual from the thoracic surgeries, partially as a result of arthritis, fibromyalgia, osteoporosis, which has resulted in four collapsed vertebra and numerous rib fractures. I'm unable to tolerate pain medication, and so far no relief has been found since some days are more difficult than others. I never know what tomorrow will bring and therefore I'm unable to plan ahead. God chose to spare my life. Considering all that has happened, this alone is a miracle. I don't know what His purpose is at this point, but I'm sure there is one. I still believe. I still believe in healing. I still believe that God answers prayer. Will you please pray for me? If you have any material I would sincerely appreciate receiving it. I remember you in my prayers."

This woman laid upon me a very heavy burden, for I must pick her up and carry her in my prayers before God. Now don't ask me for this woman's name and address, I will not give it to you, because I must respect her privacy, but I even have another reason. If you don't know someone who is at least part way down the road that this poor woman is on, you aren't engaging the people around you. You aren't talking to people. You aren't listening to people.

You aren't aware of the people that you are talking to and interacting with and that needs to change if you're going to be able to 'do good'. I don't think there is any way in God's sight that you can 'do good' unless you can 'do good' that touches the lives of people. If you're going to do that then you have to know who they are. You have to know where it hurts, what they're afraid of, their fears, their anxieties, their desperation, so that you can 'do good' to these people.

Now I started out this message by saying it's so simple to 'do good'. To 'do good' is one of the most obvious things a person could ever read in the Bible and should be able to say, "Okay I understand it."

You know the opportunities to 'do good' are around us all the time, but the problem is, once you start, you can't give up. That's the challenge that comes to you today, Do Good!

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Ronald L. Dart is an evangelist and is heard daily and weekly
on his Born to Win radio program.

You can contact Ronald L. Dart at Christian Educational Ministries
P.O. Box 560 Whitehouse, Texas 75791
Phone: (903) 839-9300 — 1-888-BIBLE-44

www.borntowin.net