

## Doing Good for Goodness' Sake

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### Introduction

One of the questions that I have been asking myself lately is, "Why aren't people good to each other all of the time?" Now, I'm not talking about just the violent things that cause us to physically hurt each other or take each other's things. I'm thinking also about the simple acts of kindness that should constantly be flowing from us every day. It seems that this would be the best way for us to live together, but you and I know that it just doesn't seem to happen. Why is this? Though I don't have all the answers, I think it is really because we don't love Goodness enough. And I'm talking about myself as much as any of you.

This Calvin and Hobbes cartoon illustrates a common expression of doing Good to each other.

Calvin: Here! It's a comic book! It's **my** comic book, but you can read it.

Calvin: Just make sure your hands are clean and acid-free, and only touch the mylar bag, and use these sterilized tongs to turn the pages, and try not to exhale too much moisture, OK?! Don't mess it up?

Calvin: **There!** That's one spontaneous act of good will! I hope you're satisfied, Santa!!

Hobbes: I think spontaneous acts of good will should be less reluctant.

Calvin: **Reluctant ones Qualify!!**

Now here we see an act which could be classified as a good deed, but it is definitely not from the heart. Do reluctant acts of good really qualify? There can be a big difference between a good deed and Goodness. Have we ever done good deeds in that spirit?

### Doing Good

It has become almost a tradition that when David Elrod or I get up to speak to you, we tell a story on each other. So I would like to begin today by telling of the time when we were on a trip to Wesser, NC, to go rafting and hiking. We had taken our bicycles to ride from there to Fontana Dam, which is another story. When we got them out to chain them up in front of the outfitting store, David realized that one of his tires was ruined. Now if you know where Wesser is, you know that the nearest Walmart store is at least 25 miles away and getting a replacement would totally mess up the schedule. As he stood there, stunned, just looking at it – a man walked by and said, "I have one of those at home! I'll go get it for you." And he left and came back in a few minutes with the tire.

I have always remembered this as such an amazing thing! Why did this guy do that? He could have just ignored the problem and walked on by. We would never have known that he could have helped us. But something within him drove him to help us, to do good with not a single thought of reward. This should **not** be so amazing: this should be common place in a world that looks to Christ. Why don't we see more of this today? We should do Good for its own sake: because it is Good. Not long ago we were on the Appalachian trail and had stopped to take a picture. A woman came down the path and said this very thing to her son: that you should do good because it is the right thing to do. And this is all we heard of their conversation. This was a little spooky to me, since we had just been talking about this principle.

In Scouts we had as our slogan: Do a good turn daily. This was not so that we could check off on a list, but so that we would learn the value of helping people. It was a motivator to practice what we as Scouts should believe in: Goodness. The slogan was not build a fire daily, or earn a merit badge daily, but to do Good daily.

I am talking about Good with a capital "G". I see God as Goodness personified, and as such I know that I love Him and want to be with Him forever. We should want to do Good because it is a part of us, something that God planted in us that has grown like Kudzu and taken over.

A friend of mine was doing a community service when someone came along and asked, "What are you doing that for?" They could not believe that my friend was doing something for nothing except for the pleasure it brought in others. I feel sorry for people with this attitude, because they just do not get it. They have no understanding of the giving nature which God wants from us. Too many times we do Good because we expect a reward or attention. We have

our own selfish motives that we hope to accomplish. Is this really doing Good? People who do good to be seen receive all the reward they will get! Jesus told us in the sermon on the mount,

*"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." Matthew 6:1-6*

The interesting thing is that people can generally tell what is real love and real Goodness. And we remember of course in 1 Corinthians 13 that no matter what good works we do if it doesn't come from the Goodness in our heart, it means nothing.

Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:5, "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ." We should do things as though we were trying to please God, as though we were working for Him directly. Not because we are afraid of getting in trouble or being punished, but because it is for God. In Hebrews 13:2 we read, "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it." I think sometimes **we** are entertained by **angels** as well, just like the man who got the tire for David.

Christ gives us a great example, for he went around doing Good for people. One instance is the first miracle he performed: turning water into wine at the marriage feast in Cana. Christ's hesitation indicates that it was not a miracle that contributed to the overall plan, but he did it anyway so that he could do something nice for his host. Another time that I think of Christ as doing something from pure Good is when he spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well. Here again, it was not in his plan at this time to go to the Samaritan people. But He touched this woman's life by talking to her and associating with her when it seemed that no one else would.

### **Spark of Good**

But we all are sinners! Are we ever capable of real Good? In Psalms 38:4 we read, 'For my iniquities have gone over my head; they weigh like a burden too heavy for me.' And we are all in the same boat, for in Romans 3:23 we read, 'For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.' How can we continue living with this knowledge? How can we deal with the fact that deep down we are not Good like God?

Now I am not saying that we are totally devoid of any good. I don't think that God would have sent his son to earth to die for us if he did not see a **spark of good** there that he knew could be worked with. But in God's perspective, considering that he is the ultimate Goodness, we are really rather evil. We seem to find ways to get out of doing Good; we are sometimes more worried about being legal than Good. Remember Jesus when he said in Matthew 12:12, "It is lawful to do Good on the Sabbath." We may be like those who would not take care of their parents because they had given their money to God. Or those who could not see the Goodness of Christ's healing power and immediately plotted to kill Him.

We are truly far from him in our goodness. But we are not to despair, for it is God's grace that will see us through, that allows us to bear this burden of knowledge and go on, growing to be more and more like him and having the joyous life that he meant for us all to have as Christians.

God sees that spark of Good in us. This is why he says in Romans 5:8 that while we were sinners and enemies, he still loved us. That spark must be struck by our realization of the magnitude of God's unfailing love in sending His unique son to die for our sins.

We read in Isaiah 65:8, "This is what the LORD says: "As when juice is still found in a cluster of grapes and men say, 'Don't destroy it, there is yet some good in it,' so will I do in behalf of my servants; I will not destroy them all." So God does see in us the possibility of Good. And I think that He is delighted in it. Let me illustrate this by telling a story:

## Flashes in the Night

An old man was rocking on his porch at night, looking out into the darkness. He lived high up in the Rockies on what he considered his special mountain. His little grandson had crept into his lap and asked for a story. The old man said, "Tonight I would rather tell you about what I see out there in the valley. I have sort of special powers, you know."

The little boy couldn't understand. He said, "I can't see anything out there."

"Don't you see the light out there? To me it represents the good that people do."

"I see nothing."

"Are you really sure?"

"Sure! Except there are some tiny flashes from time to time."

"Yes! That is exactly what I am talking about!" the old man said.

"That's just fireflies, I guess."

"No, it is much more than that. Notice the color of the light is not right for that."

"Yeah, I guess." The little boy was trying to understand, but was wondering if his grandfather was all right. "But it is still so very dark."

"People indeed are not very good. But within each is a great capability for good. And sometimes there is a spark of goodness that is emitted from them. Just there, look! That was the widow Benson cooking dinner for a sick neighbor. And that flash over there was old Joe, who has just decided that he will actually keep his promise to treat people better. Off to the left there was the glint from a young man, a little older than you, who has just committed himself to the Lord.

"I remember that during the Great War it was the blackest that I had ever seen. There the flashes of good were even more thrilling, as countless men and women refused to let the unspeakable evil overwhelm them. They saved so many at the risk of their lives and souls."

The little boy, hearing a strange sound to his grandfather's voice, looked up to him and saw that there was a tear in his eye. "Papa, are you feeling bad?"

"No, on the contrary, I am so happy."

"But why are you crying?"

"It is because I love goodness so much. It is true that there is so much blackness; but it only makes the contrast greater when you see the light. I love to see people struggling to do what's right. When you come to love goodness like I do, then you will understand."

Now I think Jesus had this feeling when He walked this earth and saw Good coming from someone. He loved to see mankind doing Good. Let's read Luke 21:1-4:

*As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. "I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."*

Can't you see the pride that Jesus has for one of His beloved servants? Remember the times that he was amazed by the faith and good in people, especially those who were not Jews. Perhaps God will see our little glint of light and be proud of us as well.

## Conclusion

We need to determine that we will be a spark of Good in God's eyes, and that we will take that spark and fan it into as much of a flame as possible. We must do Good for its own sake, and get a good feeling from it not because we are proud of ourselves and our goodness, but because we love Goodness with all of our heart and it just makes us feel good to act on it. As Paul tells us in Galatians 6:10, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, **let us do good to all people**, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." Let us all strive to do Good not as random acts of kindness, but as a dedicated way of life. Let us love God and His Goodness with all of our heart.

So much of what being a Christian is all about is simply agreeing with God about Goodness. If we agree with Him, then many of the struggles we have trying to do what is right sort of go away. Our main problems come from our resistance to Him.