

“Do good unto all men”

John Nicholls

Just as God is good to us, so we ought to do good to others, especially in our family and to our brethren and sisters; but charitable deeds will not make us acceptable to God without the basis of faith in Him and His promises.

THE FOUNTAIN of all good is our God. After each of the six days of Creation, God looked on what He had made and pronounced it “very good”. Even today, after 6,000 years of sin and death defiling God’s work, the earth and all the wonders of Creation remain good. To walk in the fields and hills, by rivers and in valleys, to be on the seashore, being able to observe closely the things God has made—the plants, trees and animals—brings us close to the goodness of God. Several times in Psalm 107 there is the cry, “O that men would praise the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!” (vv. 8,15,21,31). In this psalm it is not only the natural creation that draws the admiration of the psalmist, but also the tender care of the Creator in saving His people from all kinds of evil.

God’s goodness to all

Regardless of whether His creatures are able to respond to Him in gratitude or not, our Creator God dispenses good to all His creatures: “These wait all upon Thee; that Thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That Thou givest them they gather: Thou openest Thine hand, they are filled with good” (104:27,28). In his teaching our Master confirms the innate goodness of God, saying, “there is none good but one, that is, God” (Mt. 19:17), and he taught that God is good to both the just and the unjust, drawing out the lesson for us today:

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father Which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them

which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore

perfect, even as your Father Which is in heaven is perfect” (5:43-48).

So, in the matter of doing good to all men, the example we are instructed to follow is our God’s. His spirit of generosity and self-sacrificing love that does good to all must animate us too. There is nothing stinting or niggardly about how He sustains His creation in being, and clothes it with such breathtaking beauty. And He has given those who listen to His Word such a marvellous hope! Our standard must be the very perfection of our Father. Freely we have received all things, so freely we must give.

The lesson of the Law

The Law called upon Israel to demonstrate the same perfection of spirit as seen in their God, Who dwelt in their midst in the tabernacle and then the temple. They were to be holy people because God was holy (Lev. 19:2). This same chapter of Leviticus instructed Israel not to reap corners of their fields, nor gather the gleanings of the harvest, like many modern agri-business farmers do to increase profitability, but to leave them for the poor and foreigner. They were not to lie or deal falsely with each other, but there was to be absolute trust between people. Wages were to be paid promptly, and they were not to defraud each other, unlike many big businesses today that delay payment as long as possible and cause smaller businesses to close down for lack of cash. They were to be impartial in judgement and not to be biased in favour of the powerful and rich. And it is in this chapter that we get the so-called ‘golden rule’ of Christianity: “thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (v. 18).

When the year of release, the seventh year, came, a slave was at liberty to go free, and Israel was enjoined not to let him go away empty: “thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him. And thou shalt

remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day" (Deut. 15:14,15).

New Testament teaching

The Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled the Law, and in his teaching added more, asking that our motives and thinking should be pure, like his and God's. People said of Jesus, "He is a good man" (Jno. 7:12); and Peter, when preaching to Cornelius, said of him, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth 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). The Lord showed he was the Son of David, the Messiah, by marvellous works of healing and goodness, and thus preached the Kingdom of God in a practical way.

James in his letter (this James was possibly the Lord's half-brother and, if so, closely acquainted with the Lord in Joseph and Mary's family for many years) emphasises the practical nature of the outworking of faith in the life of the believer. He says, "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone" (2:14-17). This brother probably had no outer garment to keep him warm, and certainly had insufficient food, like some in the Brotherhood today. Faith has to be tested for its genuineness, as Peter tells us; it has to be put to trial like the refining of gold (1 Pet. 1:7). The brother who did nothing practical for his fellow-believer could not have truly believed in the generosity of his Maker and His selfless love for His creatures. He was not trying to be holy like His God, or following the footsteps of His beloved Son.

Lessons for us today

The great lesson for us today must surely be that which has been needed throughout the ages: "the just shall live by his faith" (Hab. 2:4). There is a need for a balance of faith and its practical outworking in our lives. Our faith in God as our Creator, in the wonderful promises to the fathers of Israel whereby we may be partakers of the Divine nature (Heb. 11:6; 2 Pet. 1:3,4), is

essential. But that faith needs to have a practical outworking. This practical outworking will differ from person to person, from one family to another, from one ecclesia to another and from one country to another.

As the Apostle Paul says in the Letter to the Galatians, from which the title of this article is taken, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (6:10). So our first obligation, after our duty to our God and to our families, is to help our brothers and sisters. Our family duties should be paramount in our lives. Our personal, prayerful and godly lives should be the basis of our existence. The instruction of our children, and their welfare, should not be neglected because of the claims of the ecclesia. And even if, after the passage of time, our children do not come into the Truth, we should place no unnecessary barriers between ourselves and them, for love and prayer can conquer all things.

And then comes doing good to our brethren and sisters. Our own ecclesia surely comes first. We should be responsive to the needs and welfare of all the members, and they should ever be in our prayers. It is our privilege and joy to support the meetings, and preaching and other activities of the ecclesia. This is especially the case where, in many parts of the world, there are few or perhaps no other ecclesias elsewhere in the country. After that, there are the many interecclesial activities that go on. The preaching work of such organisations as the Auxiliary Lecturing Society and the Christadelphian Bible Mission need support. The Isolation League and the Christadelphian Homes also require a lot of support in many different ways. There are various activities such as Exhibitions, Bible Schools and Conferences, Sunday School Groups, Welfare Groups and Choral Groups that can be supported, especially in areas where there are many ecclesias.

Charitable giving and charitable organisations

We cannot forget our neighbours living close to us, and work friends with whom we may have a lot of contact. They may watch us closely to see whether we live up to the standards of conduct we profess, and we should try to do them good.

What of the many charitable organisations which exist, and which (till Christ comes) try to do good? We may feel we are able and willing to help them. Careful consideration should, however, be given to the ethos of such charities

before contributing. Do they have an anti-Israel stance? Or do they exist, in part at least, to promote beliefs we do not agree with?

Some workers for 'Christian' charities may feel that the work they do could earn them salvation, and yet we know that in the judgement some will claim to have done good things in the name of Christ, only to be rejected by him. He said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father Which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto

them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Mt. 7:21-23).

In all these considerations there is the need for a right balance. As has been shown in other articles in this issue, faith in the living God and in His precious promises is the basis of an acceptable approach to God, and we must live a life in keeping with that faith, despite difficulties and trials sent to test us. This faith in God, Who is generous and selfless towards His creation, and faith in His lovely Son who is our Saviour and example, then has its outworking in doing good to our families, our brothers and sisters in Christ and finally to others with whom we come into contact.

"In the world but not of it"

Mark Vincent

The title of this piece, though in quotation marks, is not, it turns out, a Biblical quotation at all. The phrase never occurs in the Bible in that form. It is instead a Christadelphianism, constructed through an extreme abbreviation of John 17:11-14.¹ Rather like the expression 'everywhere present by His Spirit', it is one of those phrases that is Biblical in the thought it conveys, but not literally so. We need to ensure, then, that our sense of what being 'in' the world but not 'of' it is, is Biblically grounded. That is the purpose of this article, as we attempt to lay out some principles that can be helpful in our necessary interaction with the world.

FIRST, THEN, in what sense are we to be 'in the world'? This becomes clear from passages like those in the Gospel of John. Jesus was the light of the world while he was in it (9:5), during his ministry in other words. Now he has ascended to heaven, and that role falls to us, as he made plain in the synoptic Gospels; for example, Matthew 5:15,16 (cf. Jno. 17:18). Paul re-emphasised the point when he wrote that disciples are to "shine as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15).

Lights and ambassadors

God does not require us to be ascetics, or to set ourselves so far apart from others that we have no ability to communicate with them or extend an influence. Fascinatingly, in Colossians 2:20, when

Paul is dealing with the temptation to be overly restrictive by denying oneself to an extreme and enforcing régimes of abstinence, he describes such initiatives as being characteristic of worldly people! We might think denying ourselves is spiritual, but it can, ironically, be a very worldly thing to do, pride-inducing and self-justifying as it can be.

We need to interact, then, with the world in which we live. If our light is to shine before other people, we have to be near enough to them so that they might see it. If we never even *speak* to

our neighbours, for instance, we shall scarcely *preach* to them, and we shall hardly be living examples to them so that they can experience the love of Christ for themselves. God calls upon us to represent Him in the world and to make Him manifest; by our words, our example, and our behaviour and activities.

The notion of being a stranger and foreigner is helpful here. No one is a stranger or foreigner unless they are actually *in* the foreign land in question. We have to *be* there in the foreign country in which we live in order to be pilgrims and strangers. A stranger has a level of partici-

1. Of course the expression may be used by other denominations also; I do not know.