

Do Good

July 9, 2018

John 13:33-35 (NRSV) and Ephesians 2:7-10 (Message)

Last week we began our series, "Three Simple Rules". Tonight, we look at the second rule for Christian living, 'do good'. Quick quiz: what is the first rule that John Wesley gave for Christian living? For those who were unable to be here with us last week, let's do a quick review of the rule, 'do no harm'. What advice did we get from Paul concerning doing no harm? It was to:

- † pray for God to bless those who persecute us
- † live in harmony with each other
- † allow God to be in control

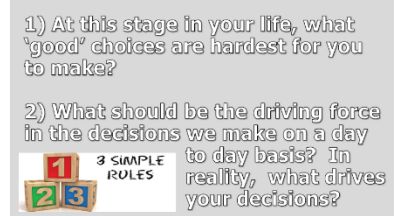
John Wesley, who is known as the father of the Methodist church, came up with the three general rules for Christian living in the late 1700's. At the time, he was leading a revival movement in England and in the Anglican Church that sought to return the people to Biblical Christian living. Tonight, we will delve into Wesley's second rule: do good. Let us pray...

When you think of doing good, what comes to mind? Is it helping a little old lady across the street? Is it holding the door for your spouse? Is it being kind in the words you say? Is it smiling at the passing stranger? Yes, it is all of these things. But it is more and Wesley believed that the source of the inner good

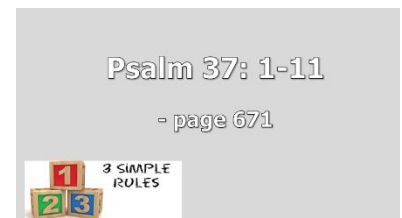
comes from our faith. True, some of these 'good things' that I mentioned are done by good atheists too. Sometimes good is done for personal gain or recognition. Sometimes it is done out of a sense of obligation. For Wesley and for us, the reason or the 'why' we do good comes from something outside of us.

As a young person, like many of you, I learned to say, "thank you" and "you're welcome" and to take out the trash and to mow the lawn. At school and in sports and in Sunday school I learned what I was supposed to do to be "good". But as I got older, I began to discover something. I did not always have to be good. Sometimes I had a choice – do I really want to go into Hartford this afternoon to tutor those youngsters at our sister church? Or... do I just want to go and hang out at my friend's house instead? Growing up you all probably faced similar choices between doing something good and doing something else, probably not as good. I came to understand that when my parents picked me up at the church later that night, they would not really know if I went to the church in the city or if I went to my friend's house. So, I began to see that I had some choices and control over where I went and what I did. I had freedom. This reality that we all come to at some point growing up is both blessing and curse. As young adults and as real adults we wrestle with our freedom all the time. Independence is a wonderful thing. Independence is also a hard thing to always control. To personalize this, let's take a couple of minutes to discuss these two questions at your tables:

- 1) At this stage in your life, what 'good' choices are hardest for you to make?
- 2) What should be the driving force in the decisions we make on a day to day basis? In reality, what drives your decisions?



In our lives, free will is something that God gave us. To force us to love and be faithful to God would be much like when we had to do our homework or when we had to do chores at home. Yes, we did what was 'good' and 'right' but not because we wanted to. And our attitude was not always the best, was it? Wesley knew that if we were to really be people who sought to 'do good' in the world, then we must be people whose hearts are bound to God's heart. To illustrate both the struggle we sometimes face and the reality that we are called to as Christians, I would like to share Psalm 37, verses one through eleven with you. The Psalm can be found on page 671 in the blue Bibles on your tables. This Psalm really shows the struggle as well as the ultimate reason that we choose to do good in the world. Please listen or read along with me:



¹ Don't be annoyed by anyone who does wrong, and don't envy them. ² They will soon disappear like grass without rain. ³ Trust the LORD and live right! The land will be yours and you will be safe. ⁴ Do what the LORD wants, and he will give you your heart's desire. ⁵ Let the LORD lead you and trust him to help

you. ⁶ Then it will be as clear as the noonday sun that you were right. ⁷ Be patient and trust the LORD. Don't let it bother you when all goes well for those who do sinful things. ⁸ Don't be angry or furious. Anger can lead to sin. ⁹ All sinners will disappear, but if you trust the LORD, the land shall be yours. ¹⁰ Sinners will soon disappear, never to be found, ¹¹ but the poor will take the land and enjoy a big harvest.

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The psalmist echoes some of the ideas of "do no harm"

– do not be annoyed or envious or angry. Be patient

and trust that God is in control. Trust that God is

present and will help you. Trust in the promise. This is the goal. But as we

talked about at our tables earlier tonight, it is a struggle to always make the

good choice, to always do the right thing. Other forces are at play that cause us

to make poor decisions or to do harm to ourselves and to others. Paul writes of

this in Ephesians Two. Please read with me Ephesians 2, verse 3:

³ All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.



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flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we

were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.

Does this sound familiar? This is our constant battle with freedom, with independence, with free will. If this is where God left us, we would be in trouble. We would be subject to God's wrath. But, thanks be to God, He did not leave us here. Please join me as we read on in Ephesians 2:

⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵ even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved.



⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵ even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved.

Instead of leaving us dead in our trespasses or sins, God sent Jesus to provide another way. Instead of the punishment that we deserve, God showers us with love. Instead of holding our sins against us, God offers us grace. It is a love and grace that washes away our sins and that offers us salvation. As a family of faith we remember the provision, the way, that God made for us through Jesus Christ whenever we celebrate communion together.

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As we continue in our passage from Ephesians, I am going to shift translations. For verses seven through ten, we will be reading from the Message translation. It is a more "modern" translation. Sometimes it loses the original meaning a little bit but at other times this translation helps with life application in our day and age. In the first part of Ephesians Two, we read about our struggles with sin and decisions and then of God's gift of grace through Jesus Christ. In verses seven through ten, we will come to understand that it is a gift and also will begin to gain an understanding of our response to this gift. Please listen as I read Ephesians Two, verses seven through ten:

Ephesians 2: 7-10

- The Message



Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It's God's gift from start to finish! We don't play the major role. If we did, we'd probably go around bragging that we'd done the whole thing! No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing.

Do you hear the outright gift that grace is? This translation read, "*It's God's gift from start to finish*"! What a gift it is. And it is all God's idea, all God's work. As I read, "*God does both the making and saving*". Why is the work God's alone? Did you catch the why? So that we do not brag. So that we do not think we could do it on our own. And now, here's the last line again. It is what our response should be to God's love and grace that saves us. Here is verse ten, in black and white:

He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing.



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To do good. It is why we were created. To do good work. We are invited to join Christ in this work. This version translates the last part as "*work we had better be doing*". Work we had better be doing.

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So far, we have talked about our struggle at times to always make the good choice. We looked at the psalmist's understanding of this struggle and at the

promise that we hold to as believers. Lastly, we covered the fact that we are called to 'do good' by God. To me, this is our grateful response to the love and saving grace that we experience as followers of Christ. It is not something we have to do. It is something we are blessed by when we do it.

As we close, we turn to Christ and the words of advice and encouragement that He gave his disciples as His time here on earth drew near to a close. As we read these verses from John 13 together, envision Jesus speaking these words to us:

³³ Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, "Where I am going, you cannot come."



³³ Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' ³⁴ I give you a new command, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

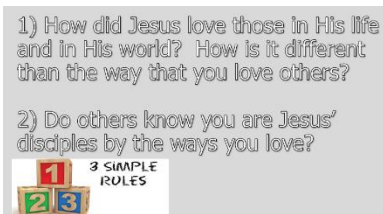
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Jesus' new command was to love one another as I have loved you. Jesus was not asking them to love as the world loved, but to love as He loved. This is where we end tonight. Next week we will look at some of the ways we can 'do good' in our lives and in our world. I hope you can join us next week as we continue to look at Wesley's second rule for Christian living. But we end here tonight and I invite you to consider these two questions this week:

1) How did Jesus love those in His life and in His world? How is it different than the way that you love others?

2) Do others know you are Jesus' disciples by the ways you love?



Let us pray...