



Good Deeds: Where Does It Stop?

Brownsburg Church of Christ

by Edwin Crozier

September 22, 2013

AM Assembly



Introduction:

Let's begin with a story. A Jewish man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. By chance, a priest was going down that road. When the priest saw the beaten man, he passed by on the other side of the road. Sometime later, a Levite was also walking down that road. When he saw the beaten man, he also passed by on the other side. Sometime later, a Samaritan, a man hated by Jews, came to the place where the man was. The Samaritan had compassion on this man who likely would have passed by had roles been reversed. He went to him, bound and treated his wounds using his own oil and wine. He set the man on his own animal and walked the rest of the way to the inn. He spent the rest of the day and night taking care of him. Then he gave two days' wages to the innkeeper to care for the man and promised to cover any other expenses when he returned (cf. **Luke 10:29-37**).

There are no easy answers. The lawyer was clearly hoping to learn some qualifying modifiers to make this command of love easier. He was hoping to find a little relief from what seems like an impossible command. However, Jesus didn't give him any easy outs. He didn't draw any lines. He basically said that everyone the lawyer came in contact with was his neighbor and he needed to love them. We can hear those profound lessons, be moved by them, but still get done and say, "But I can't do that for everybody. Where does it stop?" Rarely does the question get asked this way. Rather, the questions I hear (and ask myself) are: "Do I have to stop for every car broken down on the side of the road?" "Do I have to give money to every beggar on the street?" Or I hear (and say): "You can't expect me to visit every sick and shut-in person." "Surely you can't expect me to invite every single person I talk with to have a Bible study." What are the healthy boundaries for these good deeds? Where does it stop?

Discussion:

I. Remember, love is a sacrifice.

- A. When the Good Samaritan loved his neighbor he used his own oil and wine, he put the man on his own animal and walked. Have you ever wondered where he got the bandages? He probably wasn't carrying a first aid kit. Rather, he likely ripped up one of his own garments. He used the rest of his day and night to care for the man. Then he gave two days wages to the innkeeper and promised to cover any other costs. This one good deed cost the Samaritan. We have to start with this principle: loving our neighbor means sacrifice.
- B. I start here because I fear in my own life, I don't really want healthy boundaries on good deeds. I want some plan to do good deeds that doesn't cost me anything. I want to live my life my way to my heart's content and then if I have anything left over give that up. That is loving me; that is not loving my neighbor.
- C. In **Galatians 6:2**, Paul talks about loving our brethren and says, "Bear one another burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (ESV). What happens when I bear someone else's burdens? I get burdened. If I'm not bearing an extra load, I'm not bearing anybody's burden. It reminds me of the times I've helped people move and we see a big piece of furniture. We have six guys picking it up and I'm running around trying to find a place to grab hold. Finally, I grab it with one hand, but I'm not actually carrying anything. I'm just touching the furniture so it looks like I'm helping. Others are bearing the burden, not me.
- D. In the same way, we can do token good deeds to look like we are involved, but not really love our neighbors. If there's no sacrifice, no burden, it's not the Good Samaritan's kind of love. And so, someone comes forward at the end of the sermon. We hug them and promise to pray for them. But we don't follow up later. In fact, we're a little afraid to because what if they latch on to us and want to talk several times per week. Or how often do we ask if someone needs something because it is the polite thing to do, but if they actually said, "Yes, could you please...," we'd be shocked and a little annoyed. I was called on this one time by an elder. He was in the hospital, and I did the polite thing of asking if he needed anything. He responded, "Oh thank you, I need someone to cut my grass." After my look of shock was registered, he let me know that his son was taking care of that but was just wondering if I really meant what I offered. How often are we willing to love when it doesn't cost us anything? That's not the kind of love Jesus is talking about.
- E. I start with this point because I hope we all understand that nothing in this lesson is to be taken as an excuse not to love someone in deed and in truth. The goal is to help us have a plan to love in healthy ways, not to justify not loving. For more on that issue, consider our earlier lesson on "Seeking to Justify Himself."

II. Prioritizing our good deeds.

- A. There is an aspect of impossibility to what we've been talking about. If Jesus says everyone is our neighbor, that means we have over 7 billion neighbors in our increasingly global community. Whereas our ancient counterparts often lived and died without venturing out of their 20 mile radius, almost everyone in our part of the world is at least a state traveler and even nation traveler, if not a world traveler. When Jesus told the Parable of the Good Samaritan, if you didn't actually happen upon someone in need, you probably weren't going to find out about it. But with the advent of the electronic media, e.g. television news and internet, we know about all kinds of needs. We may not literally cross paths with a homeless man as we travel today, but we know that 15% of Americans are living below the poverty level. On any given night more than 600,000 people in our great nation are homeless and almost half of them are not only homeless but will not have any shelter when they try to sleep tonight. But that is not all. We hear about slave trafficking worldwide. We know that abortion needs to be fought, and the resulting needs for adoption. We think of the billions of lost people who need the gospel. Not to mention, we hear about Christians who are struggling, either emotionally, spiritually, financially and on the list goes. It is no wonder we see a person asking for help and we feel an overwhelming burden and then sense of guilt.
- B. We must not allow the idea that we can't do everything lead to doing nothing. However, there is one biblical principle that helps me: "For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have" (**II Corinthians 8:12**, ESV). Let's face it, we can't do everything. That is impossible. And praise the Lord, that isn't the requirement. We all only have 24 hours/day. We each have our own amount of resources, some more, some less. We just can't do it all. We can't respond to every need expressed in our global society. While God doesn't expect from us what we don't have, He does expect what we do have. And as we said, He does expect us to sacrifice. As even the Macedonians had done according to **II Corinthians 8:3-4**: "For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints..." (ESV).
- C. On a practical level, this reminds me of what John Maxwell tells us about our time. We all have enough time to do anything we want, but we don't have enough time to do everything we want. That means we must prioritize. While in the financial realm, that is not exactly the case, it still has application. When it comes to good deeds, we have to prioritize. Consider some prioritization.
1. **I Timothy 5:8** explains that anyone who doesn't provide for his relatives, and especially his own household, he is worse than an unbeliever. Our family takes a priority for us. In other words, taking necessary food, clothing, and shelter from our kids to give to someone else is not being a good steward of God's blessings. Now, that's not the same as not working good deeds for our neighbor because we have to first make sure our kids get to be involved in every extracurricular activity their heart desires, has every gizmo and gadget they want, and has a closet full of designer clothes. But having said that, we do see that family takes a priority.
 2. **Galatians 6:10** says, "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith" (ESV). This passage explains that while we do good deeds for anyone, our brethren should take precedence. Notice, this doesn't say we only do good deeds for Christians, but it does say we especially make sure to do good for our brothers and sisters.
 3. While it was part of the Old Covenant, I think there are some stipulations in that covenant that can give us some insight to a next level of priority. We could look at all kinds of passages that show this, but I'll just select one. **Deuteronomy 14:28-29** talks about the tithe. It was to be used to help the Levites, the widows, the orphans, and the sojourners *in the town*. The "sojourner" was a non-Jew who lived in the town with the Jews. I think we get a good principle to help us out. Our own community should take some precedence in our good deeds. Are we really loving our neighbor if we make an annual contribution to the "Hungry Children's Fund of South Africa" but we aren't helping any of the needy and hungry children in Brownsburg or Indiana? And there are some.
 4. Again, please don't use this as some excuse not to help in some case of urgent need that you learn about just because it doesn't fit neatly into your priority plan (cf. **Titus 3:14**). At the same time, don't beat yourself up because you can't do everything. Prioritize.

III. Let love limit love.

- A. The next question we have is how far do we take this. Do I have to give something to every person begging for aid? Do I keep giving to someone who misuses what I give him? The answer to that question is not easy. If you're like me, you want a line drawn. "Give this much, no more." "Give to these people, not those people." "Give this many times and your love is fulfilled." It doesn't work like that.

- B. The answer to this question is found in the command itself. “You shall love...your neighbor as yourself” (**Luke 10:27**). The passage does not say I have to give money to everyone who asks. But I do have to love everyone. Therefore, the question in any given situation is not, “Did I give someone money?” The question is, “Did I love them?” This brings us to the healthy boundary: let love limit love.
- C. So let’s get this down to brass tacks. Let’s use an extreme case to illustrate. You’re walking in downtown Indy and you pass a guy with a sign that says, “Homeless vet. I’m hungry...please give.” Are you aware that just because someone gave the man money doesn’t mean they loved him, and just because someone didn’t give him money doesn’t mean they didn’t love him? Many people who gave to the man aren’t responding to this man in love. Rather, some are responding from guilt: “Oh man, I heard that sermon on loving my neighbor; guess I have to give.” Some are responding from shame: “Oh man, I feel so bad because I have so many blessings this guy doesn’t have. I’m just part of that evil capitalist culture. I should give.” Others are responding from convenience: “I know that loving someone means getting to know them and trying to really help them, but I don’t have time for that. It is so much easier just to drop a buck in his can.” In each case, these people gave the man money, but they didn’t love their neighbor. We also need to understand that loving is not the same as enabling. When we have good reason to believe that a person is just being enabled by a financial donation, we are not loving that person by giving them money. In that case, we are actually hurting them. However, that doesn’t mean the loving thing is to do nothing. That certainly doesn’t mean the loving thing is to drop a note in his can that says, “Get a job!” I know it’s not convenient, but instead of just walking by and either handing out five bucks or looking the other way awkwardly, why not invite the guy into the nearest restaurant. Buy him lunch and then start getting to know him? Why not ask him if he likes where his life is? Why not ask him if he would like to escape that situation? Let him know that you’re a child of God and long to help people, but that means so much more than giving a handout or a free meal. Let him know that you want to be of help to him, but that means being invited into his whole life, not just his lunch time. If he’s interested, you may have met someone you can really love. If he says, “No, thanks,” then you know that the loving thing to do is not enable the man to live this way by continuing to give handouts. Maybe you really don’t have the time for that. Perhaps you can come up with a shorter version of that and do something like Peter and John did in **Acts 3:6**: “I don’t have any money for you. But I’ll tell you what I do have. I have a lot of love and I’d like to spend some time with you, helping you get on your feet. I can’t talk much now, but if there’s a time where we can get together and talk about how Jesus helped me and how He can help you too, when would that be and where can we meet?”
- D. This was one extreme situation that I hope illustrated the point. So, do you have to give money to every beggar you see? No, of course not. But you do have to love every beggar, every person you see. That is the question. Was your response to them love or something else?

IV. Seven kinds of good

- A. This point could and probably should be an entire lesson or even series of lessons all on its own. But another problem we often have is just looking at all the different kinds of good works that are out there. We actually do pursue some good works, but then we hear a lesson about a particular kind of good work that we don’t do much of and we start beating ourselves up as a bad Christian who doesn’t love our neighbor. I don’t think this is fair or right. Again, I don’t want to provide wiggle room for avoiding good works. However, I believe there is a good biblical principle that should provide us comfort here.
- B. In **Romans 12:6-8**, Paul presents seven kinds of good. I’ve actually presented a series of lessons from this about the giftedness that Christians have. The seven different “kinds” of Christians are discerners (my more mundane name for the non-miraculous qualities that go along with the “gift of prophecy” mentioned in this passage), servants, teachers, exhorters, sharers, leaders, and givers of mercy. The fact is teachers and exhorters are much more likely to conduct Bible studies, pursue what we commonly call personal evangelism, and preach sermons. Givers of mercy and servants are much more likely to shovel a widow’s driveway, visit the shut-in in a nursing home, provide a meal for a hungry person. Discerners and leaders are much more likely to confront someone caught up in sin or counsel someone to help them overcome whatever has brought them to need a handout. Sharers are much more likely to give a handout.
- C. I have heard it described this way. If you are looking at the inside of a Baby Grand Piano and you hum or play a perfect B flat on another instrument, the B flat string on the piano will start to vibrate, but none of the other strings will. Why? Because it is tuned to respond to that tone. People with these different gifts are wired to respond to different needs and therefore pursue different good works.
- D. Don’t misunderstand. **Titus 3:14** says we must be devoted to good works, helping in cases of urgent need. You may be a teacher and doing all kinds of good works in teaching. You can’t see an urgent emotional need

in someone, for instance someone crying over the loss of a loved one or a failed marriage, and say, "That's not my gift. Too bad for you." You may be a servant and doing all kinds of wonderful acts of service. You can't see an urgent teaching need in someone, for instance someone a lost friend asking you a Bible question and say, "That's not my gift. Too bad for you." Neither of these examples is loving. However, we all need to understand there are different kinds of good works. Everyone will naturally gravitate to the ones that fit their gifts, and we shouldn't sit in judgment just because someone else isn't involved in our good works.

- E. Having said all of that, this is not a free pass on good works. Let's not play games like we have no gifts so we don't have to do good works. If you want to justify not doing much serving because you're more of a teacher, then what good works are you doing in your family, in your congregation, and in your community when it comes to teaching? If you want to justify not doing much in the way of spreading the gospel through teaching because you are more of a servant, then what good works are you doing in your family, in your congregation, and in your community when it comes to serving?

Conclusion:

So, here is the final question on this lesson. Can you pinpoint the sacrifices you are making? What are your good deeds costing you? Do you see a time sacrifice? A financial burden? And emotional, psychological, or spiritual burden? We can have healthy priorities, establish healthy boundaries that are love, and even highlight what kind of good deeds we are going to naturally gravitate to. But if we can't show the sacrifice, we can't claim to love as the Good Samaritan did. That kind of love costs. That kind of love sacrifices. That kind of love gets burdened. But that is the kind of love Jesus has for us. How are you doing at that?