

Christ Our Standard

Going About Doing Good

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Given 31-Mar-01; Sermon #494

It is only one week until the Passover, this coming Friday evening. If we have not already begun (and I hope most of us have), this is a time when we really bear down and begin to evaluate the past year of our lives—our progress, our growth, and maybe for some of us our backsliding. I hope that is not the case; but, if you are going to face facts, some of us probably have backslid a little bit. This is the time that we need to hitch up our pants—or, as they would say in the Bible, "gird our loins"—and go and do what is right. Repent and try to live better—live the way that God wants us to live.

As we begin a new sacred year, it is always beneficial to our salvation—to our spiritual progress—to see where we have succeeded, and also to see where we have failed, then resolve to improve, seek forgiveness, repent, and start afresh. We are forced to do this once each year. However, we should be doing it more often. But the Passover season crystallizes and focuses our attention on these types of things. So most of us do some type of *self-evaluation* in preparing to take the Passover.

Please turn with me in II Corinthians 13:5. This is a scripture that we will probably come to more than once during the next week or two. This is especially a "Days of Unleavened Bread" type of scripture. Paul writes to the Corinthians:

II Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. . .

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Prove yourselves. That means test yourselves—make sure that you are real and true, genuine and not counterfeit.

II Corinthians 13:5 . . . Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.

That means, "Unless indeed you are truly counterfeit." None of us want to be counterfeit. But the way that we see if we are really *in the faith* (that is, being faithful, converted, and truly one of God's children working toward the Kingdom of God) is whether we see Christ in us. Do you see Christ in you? Can you see the proofs of Christ's life in your daily activities? In the way you get along with people? If not, we had

better take a step back and evaluate how our life is going. We are on thin ice with God if we do not see the proofs of Christ living in us very evident in the way we live our lives.

I hope it is not; but, if that is the case with us, repentance needs to take place. And, as Mr. Armstrong said time and time again during the late '70s and early '80s, we need to put ourselves back on track. How do we do this? I have already mentioned that we have to see Christ in us. So we must examine ourselves against a standard. You cannot examine yourself—you cannot evaluate yourself—just by gray nothingness. There has to be a plumb line of some sort that you have to evaluate just where you stand. We know that just a few chapters before this Paul says:

II Corinthians 10:12 For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

We see that to compare ourselves, or to evaluate ourselves, or to examine ourselves against a standard like ourselves is not wise. It is not going to give us a true measure of where we actually are. We have to evaluate ourselves against something greater than ourselves, and greater than our peers, and greater than man—if we are to get a true evaluation of just where we are in our walk toward the Kingdom.

So, what do we compare ourselves to? Of course, the answer is very obvious; and we all know what it is. Jesus Christ is our Standard. However, as with most of my sermons, we are not going to go directly there. We are going to go around and hit it from behind, probably; but that is the gist of this sermon. As we approach this last week before the Passover, we need to get our minds focused on the Passover. That is, Christ—our Passover (which was the theme of last week's sermon). I thought I would follow up that sermon with Christ, our Standard and give us an extra bit of understanding about what we are evaluating ourselves against. Nothing, or no one else, comes close to being good and pure and holy and righteous enough to epitomize the *perfection* that God wants to see in us.

Romans 10:4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

I wish they had translated this just a little bit better. We, through my dad, have gone through this quite a bit in the past year or so. This means that Christ is the goal. Christ is the purpose. Christ is the end result of the law. In a way, you could say He is the

epitome. He personifies everything that we, or the law, or anything that is part of God's way points to and tries to emulate and aspire to. Christ embodies everything that the law is. And not just the law, but everything that is good and right and godly is embodied in Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-16 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness [of deceitful plotting] by which they lay in wait to deceive, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

If you were counting, you would have seen that there were two times in that section that we just read where Paul points us to our Standard. He did it once in verse 13 and once in verse 15. He specifically said that we are to come to "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" and then, in verse 15, he said that we "may grow up in all things into Him." He is very specific here as to what our standard is, and as to what the purpose of the ministry is. We are to facilitate your growth, as well as our own, into Christ. It is amazing to look at this from the standpoint of the loftiness of that goal. Here we are, human beings that have been given the task—yet also given the gifts, in measure—so that we can do this and help you reach that goal.

For a minister, you kind of look and say, "Wow. I'm actually doing something that's really great here," if I am faithful. And it is going to take a lot of effort to do our part to bring you to the point where God is pleased with you. That is why there is such a strict judgment on the ministry, because they have such a high calling and such a tremendous responsibility to shepherd the flock—until we all come through the door and into the sheepfold and make it to the Kingdom of God.

I want to concentrate somewhat on the context that surrounds both of these mentions here (in Ephesians 4:13 and 15). Maybe it is just the way that I look at things (I do not know if it is actually there or not), but this is the way it appears to me. The first mention in verse 13, if we look at it in the sense of a three-dimensional object, this one is depth.

"The measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." This one is a very deep idea. We get to see Christ in this dimension of depth, and that is our goal.

The words around it have a lot to do with knowledge. "Com[ing] to the knowledge of the Son of God." In a way, you could say that this particular goal's focus is on the ministry teaching and the people learning—so that we come to an understanding like that of Christ. Do you understand what I mean? The focus is on learning from a person's end; not from the ministry's end. From the ministry's end, it focuses on teaching. But from a lay member's viewpoint, this would be on learning the knowledge of the Son of God so that we come to the same depth of understanding as Christ. Does that make sense to you?

The second one, in verse 15, is after the section about avoiding being deceived. This one has to do with growth. Maybe we could put it in a more general term and say *action*, application. The one has to do with learning. The other has to do with applying the truth. So the one in verse 13, to me (this is the way I look at it), has to do with us coming to a knowledge equal to—and an understanding equal to—what Christ knows and understands. But the second one has to do with applying that knowledge—that truth—in the same degree that Christ did.

Notice how he puts that. That we may "grow up in all things." This is the breadth. If the first one is depth, this one is breadth. Not only are we to come to the knowledge of the Son of God, we are to act like Him in every situation. And that is the level of growth that God expects of us. We are not just to *know* everything that Christ knew. We are to *do* everything that Christ did—to the same level.

As I have been saying, this is a very lofty goal that we have. Our standard is so high that we cannot see it—except through a glass, darkly. This is what we struggle to achieve in our Christian lives. And that is why the ministry has been given to the church—to help, because it is no easy task. The ministry itself is doing the same struggling in their own personal lives. And they have the "added burden" of helping others along the way. But now, I hope you can see with me the depth and the breadth of this goal that we have.

Are you starting to get the feeling that God expects a lot from us? He does! He really does! Most of us understood the deep part—coming to the knowledge of the Son of God. But it is the broad aspect that may be daunting, or surprising, or maybe even disheartening—to think that we have to be *like Christ* every second, every word, every action, every thought, every day, all the time, 24-7, 365. That is daunting—to think that our goal is to emulate Him everywhere, all the time, in all things. That means that God wants us to be like Christ when we wake up, when we stumble into the bathroom, when

we comb our hair, when we brush our teeth, when we have breakfast, while we are driving on our way to work.

You get the point. All through the day, in every situation, there is no time that we can let down and not try to be like Christ. That is our goal. That is the road that we have been set on. It is our mission to reach the end of that road—which is the Kingdom of God—and we are not going to make it to the Kingdom of God, unless we are like Christ.

Now, perhaps, we know this intellectually—that we need to be like Christ in all things. But do we know it practically? Do we know it because we have experienced it? Do we know it because we are putting it into application? Are we *living* the life of Christ? That is where the rubber meets the road. Head knowledge counts for some. It is good to know the truth, obviously, because there is no *action* unless you know the truth. But what is God going to judge us on? How much we know, or according to our works? It is our *application* that He is looking to see. He wants to see us in action—living it, doing it, being it. Just like Christ!

Let us go to James 4. This may seem an odd place to go. It is interesting. It is really kind of strange the way that James sets this up. And I never quite looked at it this way until I put this sermon together; but it is very interesting how he ends this section. It is almost like he throws a curve ball right at the end; and, if you are not careful, you miss the point.

James 4:13-16 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit." ["Ah, we are going to make a killing."]; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. [It is gone.] Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

Now, notice how he ends this. This is really something. It seems like it is stuck on the end of this, and it does not go—it does not fit right; but it does.

James 4:17 Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.

That is an interesting way that James put all this together. Let us get the scene here.

James is writing to people who are supposed to be converted. They are people in the church. They know the basic doctrines of the church, but are they really converted? I think you can see a question in James' mind as he writes this, because they are living their lives as if God does not exist. They are making plans to go to such-and-such city and make pockets full of cash, but they never ask whether God really wants them to do that. They have left God out of their lives. Like I said, they are living as though God does not even exist—like He has no say in their lives.

James tells them, "You know, your life is very short. We're only here for a short time, and then it gets snuffed out. You're spending all your time going to this-and-that city, and making your money. What if you came by a thief in that city, and he slips a knife between your ribs, and you're gone? What do you have to show God? You've been living your life, up to this point, as if God doesn't exist. Is He going to accept you? Even though you know the truth, even though you claim to be converted, even though you have that head knowledge of what is true—is that going to tip the scales in your favor?"

He says, "Therefore to those who know to do good and do not do it, to them it is sin." Let me put this in another way so that it maybe sounds a little bit more modern, a little bit more like the way that we say things. He said, *"If you have the truth, you must do it."* Simple, is it not? James put it in the negative. I just turned it around and put it in the positive. He said, "If you know to do good and don't do it, it is sin." I say, "If you know the truth, you'd better do it." You had better live it. You are responsible and accountable for what you know.

It is interesting how he said that. "To him, it is sin." Do you know what the word is for sin there? *Hamartia*. That is the word that means 'to miss the mark.' So what is James saying here? If you know the truth and you do not do it, you have missed the mark. You have missed the target. Your arrow is not going in the right direction. What it means is that you are failing the test. Remember what it says there in II Corinthians 13:5? Prove yourself. That word is "test." Test yourself.

Remember what the next thing was? Are you sure that Christ is living in you? Well, the test is whether Christ is actually living in you; and it is also the fruit. If you are not actually applying what you know, then you are failing the test. You are missing the mark. You are committing sin. You are not *doing* what God wants you to do. He has given you the knowledge, and He expects some results from it. He expects it to be applied.

Remember the Parable of the Talents? It is the same point. God gave one five, and He wanted it doubled. He gave another two, and He wanted it doubled (or however it goes). He gave another one, and he did not do anything with it; but he buried it. So what is the

point? Jesus comes back, and He commends the first two; but He curses the third one, for doing nothing with what he has been given.

Thus, whatever the talent represents (in this case, I am using knowledge)—whatever it is that God gives—He wants at least the interest on it. That is what it says in the parable. He wants at least some growth, because at least it has been put into the bank and allowed to grow and mature there. That is the very least that He expects. But what He really expects is for us to take what He has given and *use it*.

In the parable they bought and sold; and they made profit. The buying and selling is just a way of showing that they worked with the gift that they had, and it grew. It matured. Things were produced. Fruit was produced, because they worked with it. They applied what they had been given, and it grew. When God gives us something (let us say, knowledge), He wants us to work with it—to apply it, not sit on it or bury it. Head knowledge only accounts for so much. He is going to judge us according to our works.

Hebrews 5:12-14 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

This is the same problem that we saw back in James 4:17 and in the Parable of the Talents (that is, the man with only one) that we see here in Hebrews. They had been taught; but, if they had ever done anything with it, that was a long time in the past. Now they were regressing—not progressing. They were slipping. And they had come to the point where they needed even the basic stuff re-explained to them.

How do I know that they had done nothing with the knowledge that they had? It is very clear. Paul says it very plainly. He says that they were still "babes"—that they needed the milk of the Word again. Had they actually been doing something with what they had been taught, they would not have been "babes." It does not work that way. It is like a law of the universe. If God gives you something and you start working with it, it is going to **grow!** And you are going to grow, and mature, and progress to the meat stage.

But because they still needed this milk, it is very plain that they were not *using* what had been given. That is the way it works. It is like an equation. If you give something to someone and they use it, then it equals *growth*. That is the way that it should have

happened with them; but they had not used it in quite a while, and so they had regressed. They now needed to start using it again. In verse 14, Paul says that growth happens when we *use* what we have been given. That is, when our senses are *exercised*.

To us, "senses" has to do with our five senses—seeing, smelling, tasting, touching, and hearing. But that is not what Paul means here. He is talking about our sense of judgment, our sense of reason, our sense of understanding. That is what we have to be exercising. If we live by our physical senses, that is the way of the flesh. What he is talking about here is exercising our *spiritual senses* of judgment, of mercy, of faith, of understanding. That is, *application of what we have been given*—application of the truth. When you apply it, you are going to grow. That is just the way things work.

Hebrews 6:1 Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection. . . .

Hebrews 6:3 And this we will do if God permits.

Is that not interesting? What does he say to do? He tells the people, "Stop worrying about the doctrines. Let's go on now. We've proved these doctrines, and we've reproved these doctrines, and we've reproved these doctrines, and we've reproved these doctrines. We know them! We don't need to reprove them every single time that we come up with something." He says, "Let us put these things behind us. Leave them!"

And then what does he say to do? "*Go on to perfection.*" Do you know what that means? **Do it!** That is all it means. It is so simple. The doctrines are clear. How many years did Mr. Armstrong teach us these doctrines? He was on the scene for sixty years, and he grew in understanding of those doctrines. Why? Because he was a scholar? Because he studied the Bible day in and day out, just trying to amass a great library of understanding? No. He understood and grew in knowledge because he was *living it!*

Remember my sermons from a few months ago. When you hear the truth, you apply it; and then the understanding comes. That is the way it worked in Mr. Armstrong's life, and that is the way it works in our lives. We heard the truth. It sounded right. We began to apply it. And we learned more in the depth of our knowledge, and our understanding just grew exponentially—because we did it.

It is in the *doing* that we grow. And unfortunately, in this time of scattering, more people think that it is better to "*be right*" than to "*do right*." They put more emphasis on being

right than on doing the right thing—or, growing in character. Of course, *being* right is important; but that comes as a result of *doing* what you know. God gives gifts to those who *do* the right thing. The understanding comes later. In my estimation, it is just a bunch of intellectual vanity to try to be right all the time. That is, to set oneself up as the big 'egghead' of the church.

We are much better off as humble doers of the Word, rather than trying to make everyone else conform to what we think is right. So, the knowledge of the truth is not going to impress God as much as the application of it. He wants to see the results in us—the fruit of living abundant, peaceful, godly lives.

Hebrews 6:9 But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you.

. . .

He had just gone over the unpardonable sin and falling away from Christ. And he says, "We are confident of better things concerning you."

Hebrews 6:9 . . .yes, things that accompany salvation [That is where our emphasis should be.], though we speak in this manner [meaning that he was speaking harshly to them to try to get them back on track.]

So he had to speak harshly to them, to jar them into doing what is good and right But now he softens a little.

Hebrews 6:10 For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

God is not going to forget the service that we have done. He takes that into account.

Hebrews 6:11-12 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Couched in this is a bit of a warning. He is trying to comfort them, but in the comfort is a

bit of a warning. It is "Don't get discouraged!" This process takes a long time to fulfill. It takes the rest of our lives. In a way, this is sort of the flip-side of what James said. James says that our life is short and we need to get on the stick. Paul says, "Don't get discouraged if this thing drags on for year after year after year—because you need to apply diligence, and hope, and faith, and patience to this walk." But he has confidence in us—that we can reach the goal.

That is what we have to do. We have to balance this idea that the time is short with the other side of the coin—that things could go on for a little while. At least, to the end of our lives. So we are always balancing this 'gun lap mentality' on the one hand with the *enduring* aspects of things. We must be ready to run—to sprint—while, at the same time, we are looking at a marathon. Sometimes it is hard to reconcile the two, but they are both there.

In Hebrews 12, Paul begins his final exhortation to these Hebrews. (This is similar to the marathon we just mentioned.) We have to be the tortoise, not the hare. But we have to be willing to be the hare—to put on the final sprint—if we must.

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses [all those he had mentioned in chapter 11], let us lay aside every weight [That is the first thing.], and the sin which so easily ensnares us [That is the second thing.], and let us run with endurance [the third thing] the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Notice those three things. I will say them again. The first one is that we get rid of distractions. That is, the weight that is there. In the Greek games, they ran naked. So even a piece of clothing would be a weight that could slow them down. That is the idea you are supposed to get here. You are supposed to strip bare of all those distractions.

Secondly, get rid of the sin. It is like a weight also. I put it in a separate category, because distractions are not really sin. They are just there to keep us from putting our eyes on the goal. But sin is sin, and that will really trip us up.

And then the third thing, of course, is to run with endurance so that we finish the race.

But how do we succeed? That is in verse 2. We look to Jesus—who starts and finishes

our salvation, and everything else in between. He is our salvation! If we keep our eyes focused on Him—as Peter did not do, while Christ was walking across the water and bidding him to come to Him. He took his eyes off of Christ, and what did he do? He sank! Well, this is the same sort of symbol, or metaphor—that the goal is there before us. The finish line is up ahead. And who is there? The Starter is there. Who started the race? Jesus Christ. And who is going to be waving the checkered flag as we come through? Jesus Christ. He started it, and He finished it. And He will finish it for us, as well. That is Who we must keep our eyes focused on. So, as you can see, we have come full circle again. We have come back to Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

Let us go to John 14, and we will stay on this theme from here on out. In the first six verses, Jesus really says a mouthful—especially in verse 6.

John 14:1-4 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know."

What He is doing is setting up a goal for us. He is going now to the goal. He is preparing things for us to reach it. And then He says, "You know the way there." But this really got Thomas to scratching his head.

John 14:5 Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?"

If we do not even know the goal, how can we find our route there? It is impossible. You have to have a goal, a destination, before you can pick out the route.

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

I was looking at a commentary. I do not know how many of you have heard of Thomas a' Kempis? He was a German Catholic friar back in the fifteenth century, and he wrote a work called, *Imitation of Christ*. This is what he says on this series of verses here—especially verse 6. (This is kind of a paraphrase. It is not exact.)

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Without the way, there is no going. Without the truth, there is no knowing. Without the life, there is no living. I am the way which you should pursue, the truth which you should believe, the life that you should live for.

That is very interesting the way that man put that together.

Here, Jesus emphasizes **the way**. Remember that was the question. How do we know the way, if we do not know the goal? Jesus' emphasis here is on *the way*. Some have even gone so far as to say that the real sense of this is "I am the true and living way." That is, that the words "life" and "truth" are actually modifying *way*. "I am the true and living way—the only way! Anyone who dares to approach the Father must do it through Me."

What we see is that the Father will only accept children who imitate the character and process of salvation that Christ pioneered. Remember that He is called the Captain of our salvation, or the Author of our salvation. That word, *archegos*, means trailblazer, or pioneer—one who goes before (like a captain would lead his host). Or one who builds a city so that others may inhabit it. Or one who founds something—like a dynasty, or an institution of some sort.

That is what Christ has done. He has blazed the trail. And in blazing the trail, He shows us the way to go. And the way to go is the way He did it. It is to follow in His footsteps, to imitate Him. So that Protestant idea that many roads lead to heaven is absolutely wrong. There is only one road that leads to the Kingdom of God, and that is the road that Christ laid Himself. **He is the way—the true and living way**. It is not a dead way, because He is not dead. He is alive. So He is always there to guide us along that road. And the way that He went is the way that we should go.

John 14:7-11 "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him." Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father, so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.

That is interesting. It adds another level of why God will only accept us through Christ—because Jesus was just like the Father. My mother and I were talking before church, and she was mentioning that my sons (especially John and Jarod) have hair just like me. When it grows any more than about a half inch long, it looks like a bush has just sprouted. But a son, if he is a true son, will show the characteristics of the father.

That is what we see in Jesus Christ and the Father in heaven. Christ looks like the Father. He acts like the Father. He speaks like the Father. He thinks like the Father. Everything the Father does is what Christ does. Everything the Father would do is what Christ would do. So all of His brothers and sisters (that is, Christ's) and all of His sons and daughters (that is, the Father's) are going to have to do the same sorts of things as Christ (the elder brother) and as the Father does.

That is why we have to go through Christ. There is no other way! He will accept no other children. The children *must* have the same character as the Father and the Son, or there is no admittance. So we must *imitate Christ* if we are going to make it. He is **the way!** He is the method. He is the process by which we will achieve the Kingdom of God. And if we try it any other way, we will fail. There is only one way.

John 14:12 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.

Meaning that He will be there to aid us. I think that most of us, at first glance at this scripture, would say that what He is talking about is miracles, and signs and wonders, and healings, and things like that. That is, that those of us who really believe in Him are going to be able to do those great works. I think those are included, but I do not think that is what He is thinking about—not necessarily.

You cannot dismiss that Jesus means the day-to-day works of *Christian living*. I am not talking about big things that are going to make CNN. I am talking about things like studying your Bible and then being able to explain something to someone who has a question. I am talking about having good relations with your husband (or wife), or your children. I am talking about growing in character, or overcoming a sin or a fault. And, of course, helping others attain the Kingdom of God. In the end, those are greater works than miraculous healings.

There were some people in Worldwide Church of God, years back, who were actually raised from the dead. They were on their deathbeds—maybe they were brain-dead,

they were gone. And they had hands laid on them, and they revived. Many of those same people left the church. Do you think a great miraculous healing like that—a resurrection, if you will—is as great as someone overcoming a sin if the end result is that the person who was resurrected leaves the faith? Which actually has more eternal value? The person who overcomes? Or the person who is resurrected and then leaves the church?

"Greater works than these will you do, if I go to My Father in heaven." How many people did Jesus convert during 3 ½ years of ministry? 120, maybe. That is the number we are given. So, greater works than these did the apostles. 3,000 in one day and 5,000 in another day. The whole world saying that these twelve had turned the whole world upside down. But what were their greater works? Preaching the gospel, feeding the flock, helping others to overcome and to grow and to be in the Kingdom of God.

Sure, they did their miracles; but what does God say about John the Baptist? He did no miracles, but it says there is no one greater than John the Baptist. What did he do? He preached repentance. That was a great work, because he made people realize that they were sinful and made them think about turning their lives around. Many were baptized. And, of course, later many of them followed Christ. They are waiting in their graves for the Kingdom of God. Was that not a great work that John the Baptist did?

What I am saying here is "Let's apply this personally. What great works are we supposed to do, with Christ's help?" Overcome, grow, do the day-to-day Christian activities that will end up with not only ourselves in the Kingdom but also those we have the greatest contact with and can help. Those are *great works*. The other ones may be flashy and draw a lot of attention; but the greatest works are eternal works, which actually make sure that people are saved.

John 15:1-8 "I [Christ] am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away, and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples."

We can never let it get too far from our thoughts that our every action should have its root in Christ. Without Christ, no fruit is borne whatsoever. Without Him, no true lasting good can be done. But He does not just leave it at that. He demands not just fruit but *much fruit* be borne. Here we get back to the idea that head knowledge is of lesser importance to God than application. What He wants is that knowledge to be transferred into actions, and those actions to be continued until fruit is produced. And that is what glorifies God!

We can know so much. Those men, who write those commentaries, are so knowledgeable about the Bible. They can pull up references that I never would have thought of. But did they produce the fruit? That is what is important to God. That is how He is glorified—if the fruit is produced, by applying the knowledge to practical living. That is what gets cheers from God. That is what God gives 'atta boy' for—because we are actually doing something with what we have. That is what He wants to see. He wants to see the growth.

I want you to go to Acts 10, and we will see how Peter takes all of Christ's life and pares it down to just a few sentences. It is a very insightful way to look at the life of Christ. This was Peter's speech, or sermon, to Cornelius' household when they wanted to be baptized.

Acts 10:34-39 Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all—that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree.

Did you notice the one line in there that summarizes the life of Jesus Christ? It is right in verse 38, where it says, "He went about *doing good*." We are not good. We have sins in our closets, and we are told every year to get rid of them. Jesus did not have that problem. Why? He was too busy doing good. Let that sink in.

Let us say that we have an empty jug up here. That jug is not really "empty," is it? It is

filled with air. But what if you pour water into that jug. What happens to the air? It leaves. It cannot coexist with the water. And if you fill the jug all the way up, then all the air is gone. Likewise, *sin* and *doing good* work the same way. If your life is full of sin and you start pouring in doing good, the sin must leave. It cannot help it. It is a spiritual law.

Jesus went about doing good *every* minute of His life. There was no way sin could touch Him. He was too involved doing good. He was too involved in doing God's work. He was too involved in preaching the gospel and feeding His flock. He did not have time to sin. Just notice, in Mark 1, all of the times that Mark uses the words "immediately," or "as soon as," or something to tell you that there was a pace here that was almost hectic.

Mark 1:9-10 It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove.

Mark 1:12 Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. [And there He was tempted for 40 days.].

Mark 1:14-15 Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

Do you feel this powerful force driving Him? "The time has come. Let's do it!"

Mark 1:16-18 And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. Then Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." And immediately they left their nets and followed Him.

Then, when they had gone a little ways, He does the same thing with James and John.

Mark 1:20-22 And *immediately* He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after Him. Then they went into Capernaum, and *immediately* on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught. And they were astonished at His teaching, for He

taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Mark 1:28-35 [He goes ahead and heals the man with the unclean spirit.] And *immediately* His fame spread throughout all the region around Galilee. Now *as soon* as they had come out of the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. But Simon's wife's mother lay sick with a fever, and they told Him about her *at once*. So He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and *immediately* the fever left her. And she served them. At evening, when the sun had set, they brought to Him all who were sick and those who were demon-possessed. And the whole city was gathered together at the door. Then He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He did not allow the demons to speak, because they knew Him. Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place, and there He prayed.

Mark 1:37-39 [Then Simon and the rest found Him.] When they found Him, they said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You." But He said to them, "Let us go into the next town, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I came forth." And He was preaching in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and casting out demons.

Did the Man ever stop? Do you see what He did? He filled His life with *doing good*. He carried out this hectic pace for 3½ years—going from one town to the next, healing and casting out demons, and preaching. Once He was done there, He would go somewhere else and do the same thing. In Mark 3:7-10, He was doing the same thing. Then, right after they had walked on the water:

Mark 6:53-55 When they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret and anchored there. And when they came out of the boat, *immediately* the people recognized Him, ran through that whole surrounding region, and began to carry about on beds those who were sick to wherever they heard He was.

Can you not just see this madhouse, like ants on an anthill? "Jesus is coming. Let's get all of our sick and take them to wherever He is." And they scurry about and bring them all to Him.

Mark 6:56 Wherever He entered, into villages, cities, or the country, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged Him that they might just touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched Him were made well.

And we know that, in another place, He felt every one of them as they touched Him. He said to the one woman, "Who touched Me?" He felt power going out of Him. He gave Himself all the time, throughout His whole ministry—to do good, and to be our example, to show us the way.

The Days of Unleavened Bread are just around the corner. We put out leaven, which typifies ridding ourselves of sin. Jesus did not have sin to put out. He was already completely *unleavened*. We know that He avoided sin by *doing good*. This may sound simplistic, but many of the great truths can be boiled down to very simple rules. We have ten of them that we live by. And God even boiled them down to two (the two great commandments); and then He boils it down once more, to one word—love. This is a great truth—that you avoid sin by doing good.

And this is part of the holy days—the plan that we see in Passover, and Unleavened Bread, and in Pentecost. Passover reminds us of our redemption, and our forgiveness, and what our Savior did for us. Unleavened Bread depicts coming out of sin, coming out of Egypt—laying aside those weights, those snares. And then Pentecost (and those 50 days between the Wavesheaf and Pentecost) symbolize our growth and finally our harvest as the firstfruits.

So what do we see there? It is that same process. We are redeemed and forgiven. We put out sin, and we keep it out by *doing good*—by growing, by overcoming, by being involved in this process, by walking along the way to the Kingdom of God. Once we repent of our sins, our next job is to go about, like Jesus, doing good. And where do we start? Paul says that we start right where we are.

Colossians 3:16-24 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them. Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as

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men-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

Where do you start? With the people closest to you. That is where you *start* doing good. Wives to their husbands. Husbands to their wives. Parents to their children. Employees to their employers. And chapter 4, verse 1, employers to their employees. Everyone you come in contact with! You should be doing good to them.

Galatians 6:9-10 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

So we have a family in the church that we can begin showing love toward, by doing good for them and to them. And listen to what Christ said on the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5:43-48 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and send rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? [Now listen to this conclusion.] Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Remember what Paul said in Hebrews 6:1, "Let us go on to perfection." How do we become perfect? By doing good to everyone. "Do good to those who hate you," He says (in verse 44). If we do this, Jesus says we will be complete, perfect, mature—just like our Father in heaven and just like His Son, our Standard, who is just like Him in everything, who died for all mankind. And He did it while we were yet sinners and His enemies.

I Peter 3:8-12 Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil

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for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. For "He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the LOORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the LOORD is against those who do evil."