

Potential For Good

Doing Good is not Easy

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I've never been in the Armed Services. You've probably all figured that out and knew that. The closest I ever got to the military was signing up for the Selective Service when I was eighteen, just like all American males are required to do. However, I've been told many times by people who have been in the military—especially in the Army, and I guess the Marines as well—that one of the purposes of boot camp is to break a new recruit down. That is, to totally humble him so that the Army (just to use that branch of the service) can build him up again in its own image.

They want to make a soldier out of this boy. They don't want a "Mama's boy" in there to mess things up. They have a job to do. And they want this person to be, in a way, made into their image. That is, into what a true soldier should be. So when a recruit gets rid of *himself*, his drill sergeant can make him into a "mean green fighting machine"—because that's the purpose of the military. Or, it used to be. It's supposed to be, and I hope it still is.

In a way, God does the same thing; but He uses a different method. He does not hover over us, like a cruel drill instructor. He doesn't call us names and tell us how useless we are. He doesn't scream at us for every minor infraction or every minor mistake. He doesn't make us get down and do extra pushups, or make us run extra laps or miles. He doesn't have us go clean commodes with a toothbrush, or anything that might be what we'd think was disgusting or demeaning. But He does break us down, until we feel worthless—like "a hunk of junk," as I mentioned last time. Mr. Armstrong used that term. God makes us feel totally useless and good-for-nothing.

He may do this through tests and trials. But one of the main ways that He does this is **to show us ourselves**. He makes us look into a spiritual mirror and recognize the corruption of our flesh, the corruption of our minds, the corruption of our hearts. He makes us realize how often—maybe how continuously—we have rebelled against Him. Also how deceitful and wicked our normal impulses and reactions are. When we come across any situation, our first reaction is to do something that God wouldn't want us to do. And we have to understand and come to realize that's just not godly, and we've been fighting against Him all along.

He makes us realize how much *we lie to ourselves* and how *we cover over all our secret sins* — even to ourselves. Sometimes we are even blind to our own secret sins. And

against all this evil—this is the real thing that gets us feeling small and worthless—He reveals the pure sinless life of Jesus Christ. And then we feel like an ant, or less than an ant, compared to this great Giant. There's no comparison between the pure sinlessness of Jesus Christ and our almost constant rebellion. He's the ultimate in **goodness**, and we are just normal people—full of human nature. As some of the men of the Bible have said, next to Him we are dirt. We are worms. God Himself says, "You worm, Jacob." That's the comparison.

In one place, in Isaiah, all the nations of the world are called less than the dust left in the balance. That's pretty small. That's pretty insignificant. That's pretty weak. And once we realize this, we marvel that Christ—while we were sinners, while we still rebelled against Him—died for us. That is, for our salvation—for our eternal life. Once we have this realization, we think, "*How can anyone do something like that?*"

I don't know if there's a comparison that we could make. Would you give your life to save all the lemmings in the world? Or, it could be worse. Would you give your life for all the maggots in the world? That's not too far off from worms. As a matter of fact, when Jesus Christ said that the worm does not die, He was talking about maggots. And He called Jacob, "You worm, Jacob." Would you be willing to do that? How could someone so wonderful, and pure, and sinless die for such evil people, who were rebelling against Him all the while? Who never ceased sinning until God knocked them on the head and said, "*There's a better way.*"

It's an amazing thing! Jesus Christ *could* do this, and *did* do this. As a matter of fact, from all we read in the Bible, it doesn't seem that He even thought very deeply about it. At least, that's the impression I get. It's like God the Father said to Him, "*This is what needs to be done.*" And He said, "*Yes. That's what must be done.*" And He did it! I'm not talking about when He was a physical man. I'm talking about when He was the Word, in heaven. But Jesus did this.

We can't repay such a debt. It's too great. There's just no way that a maggot could ever give us anything that would amount to payment for the giving of a life of a human being. The same relationship—the same proportion—is there between God and man. There's just nothing a human being could do to make up for such a gift.

Is there nothing at all, then, that we can do now? How can we even aspire to be as "good" as Jesus Christ is, and to have the mind to be willing to "do good" to that extent—to that magnitude? You know that last time we saw that humanity tends to be desperately wicked, as it says in Jeremiah 17:9. And, as Romans 7 says, humanity tends to serve the law of sin and death. We didn't go to the one scripture, but the

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answer was there—right at the end of the chapter. The only way—***the only good*** that comes out of this—is through Jesus Christ. That's the only thing that gives us any hope.

So in this sermon I want us to look at **our potential for good**. We've seen where we were and what's been done for us. Now I want us to look more hopefully at how good we can be. And I guess that goes with my Army theme. "Be all that you can be." "Be an army of one," let's say, because that will come in here too a little bit later on. It's amazing how the Army uses little tag lines that we can use in a sermon. But our goal is to *have* and to *use* the very ***character of God***. Once we have that, then we will be good—because we'll be godly; and anything that is godly is good.

That's basically where the word "good" comes from in our language. It means "of God." Something that is *good* should be something that is *godly*. Of course, the word has evolved from that point, and it doesn't mean that. It's taken on a much more broad and general meaning. But when I'm talking about ***doing good*** in this sermon, I'm talking about **God's goodness**.

Please go back to Romans. I want to take you through this in a step-by-step manner. In chapter 3, Paul had just been speaking about the Jews versus the Gentiles, and he says:

Romans 3:9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.

Everybody's the same—both Jews and Greeks. Both worldly and Christian, you might say. Everybody has sinned.

Romans 3:10-20 As it is written [He goes back to the Psalms.]: "There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside [gone out of the way—meaning they've left the good path]; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one. Their throat is an open tomb [meaning that everything that comes out of it leads to death]; with their tongues they have practiced deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips, whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes." Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before

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God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

This is where we left off the last time—with the understanding that we have all sinned. We are all evil. We all have this tendency in us to sin. So no man—apart from Jesus Christ—has lived sinlessly. And the picture that Paul paints here is absolutely miserable! Poison under our lips and a mouth like a tomb. Everything is bad, and this might be depressing if we just left it here. Paul doesn't leave it here, unlike me. I left it here the last sermon. But Paul was a little bit nicer, and he went right on to the next thing.

Romans 3:21 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets.

He's saying that in the Law and the Prophets was the gist of this righteousness. That it's not part of the Law. That is, a justification that is NOT through the works of the flesh, or works of law.

Romans 3:22-26 Even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

This is the next step. Let's say this is the next brighter horizon in this progression of things that occur. Here we have **justification by faith** through our belief in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And this gives us hope! It opens the door to a new life. No one deserves this. It says there, in verse 24, that we are justified *freely*. It's not something that we can earn. It's something that God gives.

It's God's awesome and free gift. But God gives it anyway, to all sinners **who believe**. He doesn't give it to all sinners. If I left it right there, that would be wrong. But He gives it to those who have faith in Jesus. This is only for those whom He's called and led to repentance. These people have the opportunity to rise above the evil that is normal, and usual, in mankind.

Paul says here, in verse 25, that God has shown *forbearance* in passing over this sin. Isn't that true? How much did He hold back from giving us what we deserved? He could squash us like bugs, or zap us until we are grease spots on the road, for our sins—for even one sin! And He would be entirely justified. But He forbore. And so what this shows is His *mercy*. And what His mercy proves is that He is *righteous* and He is *just*. It says it right there in verses 25 and 26. This demonstrates—this proves—His righteousness.

He is going to "**do good**." And this is something that we need to understand. Remember that I just said that we don't deserve this, in the least. Mr. Armstrong was fond of quoting Romans 6:23: "The wages of sin is death." That's what we deserve! We've sinned, and the wages that we're owed (from that sin) is death. But God, just because we believe in His Son, will commute that death sentence and allow His Son's death to pay the penalty in our stead.

The very Creator God—giving His life for His creation—is enough to pay the penalty for every human and every sin that ever has been or will be committed. That's the gulf that's between us and Him—that He is able to do this. And this demonstrates (as we've shown)—it gives evidence of God's justice, showing that God's justice itself is tipped in favor of mercy. God would rather be merciful.

If it were tipped in favor of just pure "down-and-out" justice, we'd have been squashed. But it shows that He holds back, waits until we understand, and then is very willing to grant mercy and grace to us. On the other hand, what this shows is His righteousness. And remember that I've shown before, in other sermons, what righteousness means. In English, it is putting two words together: "right" and "wise."

So when you are righteous, you are acting **right wisely**. That is, [you are acting] "rightly" and "wisely." And that's what God has done here. God has shown and proved through His actions—through His mercy and forbearance—that *He acts properly*. His behavior is pure and good. And this way that He has made—this way that He has designed for us to have salvation—is pure **righteousness**. This proves it, because He follows through with it.

Romans 5:6-11 For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having

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been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have not received the reconciliation.

This is the other layer that I want to bring out here. Christ's sacrifice, and our justification by it (before God), demonstrate another trait. This third trait that comes up is actually God's primary character trait. He says it right there, in verse 8. It demonstrates **God's love**. That's the next layer—God's love. And Paul says that this demonstration of God's love extends all the way out to our salvation and eternal life. His love doesn't stop when He justifies us. It continues. It keeps going. We are reconciled with God; and every time we sin and every time we are forgiven, His love is shown again. And He keeps building us up, and helping us along, and moving us forward through His purpose for us until we come to the end—where we are finally saved and given eternal life.

And it really doesn't even stop there! He will continue to love us with the same love—and maybe even greater love—in His Kingdom. It will never end. One of the purposes for this whole process is designed to demonstrate, prove, and give evidence to us that God loves us. He's held nothing back. He's totally selfless in all of this. He wants the best for us. And He has actually done something that is not against His law; but He has, rather, favored being merciful rather going through with what the law requires—which is immediate death.

So He has forborne with us, held off the penalty, and then substituted for the penalty and given us gift after gift after gift—and mercy after mercy—to finally bring us to where He wants us. That is, as His sons and daughters in His Kingdom. It's an amazing thing that we've been given! This is the other half, then, of Romans 6:23—for "the gift of God is eternal life in [through] Christ Jesus our Lord." All of these things—God's mercy, His forbearance, His justice, His righteousness, and His love—are all freely given gifts that have no end. And Paul writes:

Romans 5:18-21 Therefore, as through one man's offense [meaning, Adam's] judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's [Jesus Christ's] righteous act the free gift came to all men [meaning that it's available, or it will be available to all men], resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous. Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through

Jesus Christ our Lord.

Did you notice what it said there? That **grace** is far stronger than the law. **Grace** is far stronger than sin. **God's free gift** trumps everything! So now, if we are under grace, it should reign in our life—through righteousness, through "right-wiseness," through right behavior—and all the way to eternal life. That is, from now until then and even after then. That's what is supposed to reign in our lives. That's what our lives are supposed to revolve around—God's freely given gift.

Ephesians 2:1-6 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together [Not only has He given us grace, but He raised us up.], and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

So not only did He give us grace but also He put us into His Family. He begets us, by His Spirit, to sit right besides His Son—in heaven. We're not there yet. We haven't been made spirit. But, in God's mind, it's almost done. He sees things that have not been as though they have already taken place. Here's my proof for this:

Ephesians 2:7 That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

In a way, we've been conveyed spiritually to this ultimate pinnacle of human potential already; but it is in the ages to come that it will be given in its fullness. That's verses 6 and 7. Then he repeats this.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith [Don't forget this. God's done all this because He loves us freely.], and that not of yourselves [Not even the faith was your own, necessarily. God gives us even faith.]; it is the gift of God, not of works [Nothing we've done could ever make

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us deserve any of this.], lest anyone should boast.

So we know all of that has happened. We know where we stand. Now what do we do?

Ephesians 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

We've read this many, many times in the past several months. What's the next step? **Doing good! Behaving in a godly way.** Once we've been given all this—totally undeserved, and just scads more than we ever should be given (probably). We should deserve death, and we've been given so much. God has just piled it on. That is, all these good gifts that He's given. And now what do we do with it? Paul says that we've been prepared. This prepares us. This gives us the start—to do good works. That's where we are. That's where we maybe should have been ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, thirty—however many years ago, when we were first called.

Once God has done all this for us, our job is to begin turning the tide on evil. Slowly, incrementally, we suppress evil; and we remove it from our lives. Then, at the same time, we begin building and doing "good"—in ourselves, for others. This is very elementary theology, I know. You all should know these things, because most of us are baptized and have been given God's Holy Spirit. We should understand these things. But here in I Corinthians 5:7-8 is Paul's explanation of the meaning of the Days of Unleavened Bread.

I Corinthians 5:7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump [We could say, "the new man."], since you truly are unleavened.

That's what God did for us. He cleaned the slate for us and made us truly unleavened. He took the evil from us. That is, our sins. He wiped them totally away and forgot them—as far as the east is from the west.

I Corinthians 5:7 For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

That's how it was done. That's where all of the records of our sins were nailed to the cross, and those things were done away. Not the law! Our sins.

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I Corinthians 5:8 Therefore [This is a conclusion. This means, "because this has been done"] let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness...

Old leaven would be going back to the sins that we had done before. Why would we want to do that? Why would we want to go back into our lives—that have already been wiped clean—and pull some evil forward in keeping this feast? That's stupid. Dumb. That's already been wiped away. Let's not mess with it.

I Corinthians 5:8 ...nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness [which I take to mean something new] but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Now that we've been cleaned, let's start eating unleavened bread. That is, putting within us goodness—and using that to go forward. So the core meaning of the Days of Unleavened Bread is here. We remove the sin, with God's help, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We are forgiven. We repent. And then we put IN the unleavened bread—which is growing in the holy, righteous character of God. Goodness!

We spend seven days every year rehearsing this process, so that we remember it every year. We put *out* the old, and we put *in* new—unleavened, clean, good things. This symbolizes ingesting **goodness** and making it a permanent part of us. Just like ingesting food, and then exercising—puts muscle on the bones—we do the same things (spiritually)—ingesting good and then exercising (by doing what the good word is that we put in).

Let's now go to Colossians 3. We are going to be doing this most of the sermon—going back, going forward, going back, going forward—trying to add a little bit more; because Paul talks about this an awful lot. In just about every church that he wrote a letter to, there's something in there that has to do with this theme.

Colossians 3:1 If then you were raised with Christ...

What is our "resurrection" at this point? It's our baptism. We are put down into the water—dead. We are raised out of the water—to newness of life. So he is talking to all of you people who have been baptized.

Colossians 3:1-4 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things

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which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

This sounds very much like what Paul wrote to the Ephesians, there in chapter 2. So this is where we are. We've been raised to *newness of life*. We've been baptized. And so our job now is to be a seeker of godly things—of divine things, of good things. That means that we take an active role in **searching for** them; and, once we find them, actually **using** them.

Another thought, there in verse 4, says that this will continue all the way to the time of our glorification. It has to. We are living now in Christ. Or Christ is living now in us. And that's the way that He lives. He doesn't want anyone who isn't going to live as He does.

Now Paul gets into what it is that we must **do**.

Colossians 3:5-9 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds.

This is one part of the unleavened bread formula. **Put out the sin!** That's one thing that we have to do. We have to keep mortifying our flesh—getting rid of our carnality, taking out all the evil that we can find. He says that God is coming soon, to punish such evil; and we'd better not have it found in us.

Colossians 3:10-11 And have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all in all.

Step one was *putting out the evil*. Step two is *putting on the new man* — the image of Christ. And, as he says right here at the end of verse 11, He is everything to us. He is **all**

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we can be. And we must be moving in that direction all the time. He is **the new man** that must be formed in us.

Genesis 1:26 "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.

And what we have been given is all part of that process. It's all for that reason—to **make us like Him!** And now, in verse 12, Paul begins to tell us specifically the character traits that he wants us to work on. And it's very interesting, what he pulls out of his hat.

Colossians 3:12-17 Therefore [another concluding statement, because this is being done], as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility [humbleness of mind], meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. 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.

Did you notice what all these character traits have in common? I don't know if there is any significance to the order here, but it's very curious to me to see what he emphasizes right away. What is the common thread in all these things? They all revolve around our **relationships** with other people. Do you think "tender mercies" are for yourself? Do you think "kindness" is for yourself? How about "humbleness of mind?" Doesn't that come out in actions towards others? "Meekness, longsuffering, bearing with one another, and forgiving one another."

And then he sets off the bombshell—**even as Christ did!** Remember that he had just said that Christ is everything to us. Christ is our example. Christ is being formed in us. And then he showed all these character traits, and he says: "*Christ did all these things. How about you?*"

I think God wants us to learn to get along with one another. This section right here makes an excellent *checklist* to grade oneself against when you are involved in a conflict—whether it is somebody in the church, or whether it is somebody in the world.

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This is something that we can go back to and say: *"Have I shown tender mercies? Have I shown kindness? Have I shown humbleness of mind? Have I shown any meekness? Have I shown longsuffering? Am I bearing with them? Have I forgiven them?"*

Because of human nature, we can't expect the other person to do this. So **we** have to behave in a godly way UNILATERALLY. Do you know what unilaterally means? It means one-sided. **We** have to do it! Not **the other person** has to show humbleness. Not **the other person** has to be forbearing. **We have to do it!** And **we** have to do it no matter what the consequences to us. Why? I mentioned it just a few minutes ago. Because Christ did it! He gave everything, and it cost Him His life. And it is the same Mind that is being formed in us.

So if we want peace and unity in the church, we must individually begin practicing these character traits—*unilaterally!* I know that I have been harping on that quite a bit. Every one of my sermons in the past couple of months has come back to this point; but it is important, because we cannot change anyone else. And IF we **do them in love** [practice these character traits] — it is these things that will bond us together. And then, as it says in verse 15, the peace of God will rule; and we can be thankful—because we are one Body then, and we are not fighting one against the other.

Now, how far should we be willing to go to do these things? Please turn back to I Corinthians 6.

This chapter begins with talking about lawsuits against brethren. And Paul is tearing out what hair he has left, because **people in the church** are going to law against one another. How shameful! He really criticizes the Corinthians here, terribly. *"Aren't you guys wise enough to settle these matters amongst yourselves? Isn't there anyone that can judge these matters among you? Don't you know that, in the future, you are going to be judging angels? Can't you even judge the little things that are happening among you?"*

I Corinthians 6:7 Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another.

"You've already failed," he says. *"You are starting from a hole."*

I Corinthians 6:7-8 Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated [defrauded]? No, you yourselves do wrong

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and cheat [defraud], and you do these things to your brethren!

Not that doing them to people in the world would be any better. But it's terrible that there would be such things happening between brethren, in the church.

I Corinthians 6:9-10 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? [Look at the level he puts this on.] Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

He's saying that this "doing wrong to" and "defrauding" other people in the church is on the same level as these other things! And, just like these other things, people who do this will NOT be in the Kingdom of God. That's how serious these matters are!

I Corinthians 6:11 And such were some of you.

Meaning, before God called us into the church, some of us did these things. We should have experience with some of these things, and we should know how **bad** they are—and how much they cut us off from one another, and from God! Notice how Paul reminds them:

I Corinthians 6:11 But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

*"Look, do you understand," he says, "what's been done to you, and **for you?** And to slip back into something like this is very close to throwing things away!" So he reminds them what's been given, what's been done. That the grace of God has been displayed in their lives; and, boy, you don't want to throw that away! So the point is that, when you get into these situations with people in the church, he says, "You have to be willing to be wrong. Or even to be considered to be in the wrong—even if you are not wrong."*

You have to be willing. Like David said in Psalms 15:4—the persons who will be in God's Kingdom are those who will swear to their own hurt. That is, those who make a promise—a vow, or something of that nature. And because of circumstances, it goes and explodes in their face; and they have to take a loss. But because they promised, they are willing to **take the loss** in order to keep peace and to move forward in building

godly character.

It's very **hard to do!** I'm not minimizing the difficulty of this. Because we all have human nature, none of us wants to give in. We think we have some territory that we need to defend. We don't want to be seen as having given in. We don't want to surrender—because it seems so important that we make our point, or that we show the other guy. But Paul says that it's not worth eternal life in God's Kingdom.

God's Kingdom is so much more important! It would be much better just to take the loss, just to take the humiliation, just to take whatever comes your way in order for there to be peace and for people to get along. That is, for there to be a light of godly living shown in the congregation by the person who humbles himself, shows tender mercies, shows kindness, shows meekness, and forgiveness.

We can't get too far away from Jesus Christ on this. Please go to Philippians 2:5.

Philippians 2:5-8 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

We're not the first to do this. Christ gave us the example from the get-go. And He does it in this section TWICE! The first time, while He was in heaven with the Father, He did not consider it something to be held on to with a firm grasp—that He should be equal with God. But He gave up His prerogatives as God, and came down to appear as a servant. He didn't give up His divinity; but He gave up all the power, and all the things that He could do as the great God of this universe. And He became a sperm cell in Mary. Then, when He got here, what did He do? He humbled Himself again, and became obedient. He was still God! But He said, *"I will do Your will. I will die for these worms."*

How can we do anything less if Christ is to us **all in all**? That's something that we have to think about. God, our Savior Jesus Christ, swallowed His loss. He went ahead and did the right thing. And it says here, going on, that God highly exalted Him and placed His name above every other name—because He did this. Now, what will God do when we do the same thing? We also will be highly exalted in due time.

We may not like the feeling right now. We won't! It's painful to do these things. But God

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resists the proud, and He gives grace to the humble. And He will exalt him *in due time*. It's a tough pill to swallow. No one likes to suffer. It hurts. Christ **agonized** in Gethsemane, if you'll remember from Luke 22:44? He suffered so much. It was so painful to Him that He sweat great drops of blood—in a way, getting Himself ready for the great sacrifice that He was going to have to make. And every time, He said, "*Not My will be done, but Your will.*" And He did it.

Nobody said it would be easy. When we counsel [people] for baptism, we always say, "*Count the cost.*" This is a lifelong thing. This is not an easy thing. It's not something that we just go into blithely and float through the rest of our lives. Christianity is a hard path. It's a narrow way. But the blessings that come with it—and the ultimate goal—are worth every step!

Philippians 2:12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

Now do you understand why he says this? There has to be a great deal of **godly fear**, and there's going to be a great deal of **trembling** to be able to come through and to do what is right.

Philippians 2:13 For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

So if you think these things come on because of circumstance, you're wrong. It's God working in you—to do His will, and to do the things that please Him. God is intimately involved in our lives, and He's willing to press us to the very brink in order for some of that character to finally fasten itself on us—by exercising ourselves to do it. God's in this for the whole ball of wax. And we have to be in it to the same degree, and to be willing to take what it is to do it. God asks us to do something that is entirely inhuman and utterly impossible—but He gives us **grace** to do it.

Let's go back to John 5:30 and I want you to see that Jesus Christ did not do this on His own either.

John 5:30 "I can of Myself do nothing."

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While He was here like us, in this human form, all His strength came from God the Father. And he did it. That should be encouraging to us—that it can be done. But we have to ask, "*How's our relationship with God?*" If He's the One giving us all the strength, we'd better make sure that **relationship** is humming with all kinds of communication going back and forth, and all kinds of *strength* and *motivation* by His Spirit coming down to us to enable us to do these good things.

"Doing good" can make you feel good, but a lot of times "doing good" makes you feel bad. Not because of the ultimate results, but because it causes us to **sacrifice ourselves**. That is, to give up something. Anything that is done in godly love is going to involve some measure of sacrifice. It gets easier, I guess, in time; but that's **the essence of godly love** — sacrifice, giving in, giving up, humbling ourselves and being willing to take the low seat.

I thought this sermon was going to be encouraging; and it should be, because the rewards are so great. But to "do good" is hard. That's why very few people ever do it! I mean, we can give money and do all those things that are normally considered to be "good." That's kind of easy. But the real things that **build character** are the hard ones. [Things like] humbling ourselves, giving in, esteeming others better than ourselves, praying for our enemies, blessing those who spitefully use us. Those things are very hard to do. But they can be done.

You might want to just jot down Isaiah 40:28-29 as well as Isaiah 41:9-13. Those are probably the most encouraging scriptures that I had in my whole sermon, and I am going to skip right over them. What it basically says is that God is there for us. He is our strength. He's willing to give it at any moment's notice. So what He says to Israel, which is the context, is that He tells them to "*Call on Me, and I'll give it to you.*"

We'll go to Philippians 4:13. Earlier in the same chapter, Paul had just talked about a problem where two ladies—Euodia and Syntyche—were having a difficulty. And he tells them that he urges them to unite, to get back together. Then, after talking about some of the things that he had to go through in his own ministry, he says:

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

That's where his source of *power* was. That's where his source of *strength* and *motivation* was—to "do good." And Paul showed how he did "good" by doing the work that he did for God. He plunged on in his ministry, and he gave people what they needed. He preached the gospel, and he raised up churches. He helped convert

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people, and he gave them the truth. He tried to shepherd them through their lives. And he did this only because ***Christ strengthened him every day.***

Let's conclude, then, in Ephesians 3:14-21. The chief tool that we can use to "do good" is **the presence of God in us**. And it's our job to *step out in faith* and *use it*. It's so important that we not neglect the Spirit that God has put in us. Don't let it languish, because it will drip away—as the illustration in Hebrews 2:1-2 says so clearly. If we just leave it and don't use it, it is going to drip out like water in a water sack with a hole in it. And pretty soon, it will be nearly all gone—if not all gone.

Ephesians 3:14-21 [Paul says] For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man [That's what I have been speaking about.], that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith: that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations [throughout all ages—which includes us], forever and ever [a world without end]. Amen.

So this is where we have to start "doing good." To go before the Father, our God, and to thank Him for our calling, to thank Him for what He has given; and to ask Him that He would grant us the strength and the gifts to fully comprehend and perform the love of Christ. That He would fill us with all His fullness, and that we would follow through in fulfilling our potential for good.