

**Doing Good - or Not**  
Harmony M.B.C., July 20, 2013  
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**James 4:17** Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth *it* not, to him it is sin.

This is an often-quoted portion of the Word, but I am not sure how well we as believers understand the principle taught here. We want to look at the lesson the Lord gives us here and learn something about this warning from Bro. James.

Before we look into the teaching of this scripture, I need to say something about what may be a misconception about good and doing good. Some folks take Jesus' statement in which He said, "there is none good but God," connect it with Paul's writing in **Romans 3:12** in which he points out that God has said there is none that doeth good, and arrive at the conclusion that we cannot "do good." I hope in this message to show that we can do good, and I will define what that good is. But, to start, our text should make it plain that we can do good, and John states it plainly in **3John Verse 11** - Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. **He that doeth good is of God:** but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.

- I. First, let us learn that this is not about doing bad, but about refusing to do good.
- Omission becomes sin.
  - Taking no action when the opportunity to do good is given to us becomes sin
    - ▶ Illustrate by contrast: here is a man who is standing on a dock and someone has fallen off the dock, is going down for the third time, as they say. He is within arms length of this person and could simply reach out his hand and give the man a saving arm. But, he stands there looking at the man as he sinks underwater for the last time.
    - ▶ Here is another man who is on a dock with someone, he pushes that person into the water, then takes a pole and holds him under until he drowns.
    - ▶ According to the way we know the moral teaching of the bible, the second man committed murder, but the first man was just negligent...he knew he should reach out a hand, but he just didn't do it. This is what our verse is talking about.
    - ▶ Illustrate by contrast: A disabled lady in a wheelchair is trying to get a carrying case out of the back of her van. A guy walks over, pulls it out of the van, helps the lady settle it on the carryall of her automated wheel chair and goes on.

A disabled lady in a wheelchair is trying to get a carrying case out of the back of her van. A guy walks by the scene, looks at the struggling lady, and walks on ignoring her difficulty.

- ▶ This teaching is about negligence

II. Next, believers know inherently (from the Holy Spirits guidance) to do good; believers are also taught to do good by scripture (**Heb. 13:16** But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.). Because of that, we see that this verse points to the critical need to know what good is.

- Why do I say that? Because, too many people today actually do things out of ignorance that are evil, that are wrong, because they are not well-taught to know the difference between good and evil.
  - ▶ I've met people who grew up in households where the parents cursed all the time and never made any attempt to teach their kids that cursing was wrong. Those kids cursed like sailors and never had a thought about it.
- Then there is the case where a lot of people are taught and taught and taught the difference between good and evil and the lesson never seems to sink in
  - ▶ I've used this illustration before, but it will do to use it here again: Back in the 60s, Merle Haggard sang a song on the Country and Western charts and one of the stanzas went something like this:
    - "One and only rebel child from the family, meek and mild  
My mama seemed to know what lay in store  
Despite all my Sunday learning towards the bad, I kept on turning  
'Til mama couldn't hold me anymore...."
- Then there is the case where people are taught in a way that they understand the difference between good and evil, but go ahead and do the wrong anyway.
- Then, there's another reason I say that our text points us to the critical need to know what good is. That is, we are just now at the place of biblical prophecy where spiritual and secular leaders in our country are redefining good and evil. In that redefining, they are calling good evil and evil good. This can actually cause people to do evil thinking they are doing good.
- I don't want to leave this point until I have said something about what good is. I'll summarize then illustrate. Good, or doing good, is being like God. I think one of the best lessons in the bible on doing good in the context of our message is that story about the good Samaritan (**Luke 10:30-35**):
  - ▶ The man on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho gets attacked by thieves who beat him nearly to death, take everything and leave him there to die
  - ▶ Those priests and that Levite who came by were not technically in transgression when they saw this man and passed by on the other side...they

simply refused to do him any good

- ▶ The Samaritan who came by was not technically bound to help this man in any way. Samaritans were rejected and hated by the Jews and there was enmity between them.
- ▶ But that Samaritan 1) had compassion 2) took the initiative; 3) took personal pains to give the man relief 4) went even further by taking him somewhere that he could be nursed and 5) went even further and paid for the injured man's needs.
- Now, when Jesus summarized the lesson taught by this, do we remember what question He was answering? Right. The question was, "who is my neighbor?" His answer, when we look at the parts of this story was, "Your neighbor is someone that you have an opportunity to do good for; someone who needs help; and you take those steps to do good to them."
- Then, do we remember what prompted this question? Right. It was the question about what the greatest commandment was, and Jesus summarized the two great commandments, "Love God, and love your neighbor as yourself." Those two commandments were the hinge pins of the whole law. The whole law is an exposition on how to be holy like God.

III. Thirdly, notice how personal this omission gets: "...to him it is sin."

- We have not engaged somebody else in sin by what we have failed to do, but personally, to ourselves, it becomes sin.
  - ▶ I know all of you have noticed that when you cut your finger, nobody else bleeds...right?
- The blot on the conscience is on our conscience alone
- The use of the preposition "to" suggests to us that we will not be able to escape the reality that the omission was a sin (i.e. it doesn't say "for him" or "upon him," but rather "to him")
- Our souls will become branded by this kind of negligence

IV. Last, this compromise will enslave us to negligence.

- There are far more types of slavery than being under bondage to some other human
- Notice how Peter puts avoiding evil and doing good together as a divine recipe for having a good life. **1Peter 3:10-11** "For he that will love life, and see good days,...Let him eschew evil, and do good...."
- Paul introduces a principle that fits this situation in **Rom. 6:16** "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey...."