

"Sir, we wish to see Jesus" — John 12:21

Loving What Is Right

Gary Henry

Even if you are not a student of the Bible, you will have heard of the "Good Samaritan" parable in Lk. 10:25-37. On the road from Jerusalem down to Jericho, a certain man lay half dead, having been beaten and robbed by thieves. When a priest happened by, he noticed the man in need, but gave no help. Later a Levite came along. Not wanting to get involved either, he "passed by on the other side" just like the priest. But when a despised Samaritan came to the scene, he did what was needed, at considerable inconvenience and expense. Jesus said he "showed mercy," and the Good Samaritan now stands as a symbol for anyone who actively serves the needs of his fellow man.

But I wonder about the priest and the Levite. Weren't they "good" men? It seems not unlikely that their next-door neighbors would have described them as "decent, clean, upstanding folks." They both had steady jobs. They were probably friendly when you saw them, but also minded their own business. Likely they kept their lawn up so as not to be an embarrassment to the neighborhood. They didn't let their teenagers get drunk and hot rod up and down the street at two in the morning, etc., etc. Surely they were "good, moral people" weren't they?

Well, the priest and the Levite were good in exactly the sense that many of us think of ourselves as being good: they did not murder, did not commit adultery, did not lie, etc. They perhaps secretly congratulated themselves for being above average morally because they would not stoop to engage in the despicable things they frowned on in others. The strength of their own morality was measured by the intensity of their negative feelings about the immorality of other people. They were "good" because they had a long list of practices they felt strongly against. In other words, righteousness for them meant scrupulously avoiding unrighteousness.

We shouldn't minimize the importance of fleeing evil, obviously. But there is more to being truly moral than looking down on immorality in others. One of my favorite quotations is a line from Roy Masters which says: "Loving what is right is different from hating what is wrong and feeling right about it." This means that we don't truly qualify as being on the side of truth and goodness if all we do is criticize the sin we see around us. There is, of course, no lack of things in the world that are wrong, and we ought to feel a genuine revulsion for these sins. But neither ought we to confuse this revolting feeling with a true love for what is good.

It is also a mistake to confuse a merely intellectual appreciation of goodness with genuine love for what is right. Really loving what is right goes beyond abstract appreciation. Many years ago, Charles Finney made this observation: "Moral agents are so constituted, that they necessarily approve of moral worth or excellence; and when even sinners behold right character, or moral goodness, they are compelled to respect and approve it, by a law of their intelligence. This they not infrequently regard as evidence of goodness in themselves. But this is doubtless just as common in hell as it is on earth. The veriest sinners on earth or in hell, have, by the unalterable constitution of their nature, the necessity imposed upon them, of paying intellectual homage to moral excellence." And neither is an eagerness to debate issues of right and wrong proof that we love the good. As Adlai Stevenson remarked, "It is often easier to fight

Wear Masks

Today's

Schedule

The Lord's Day

8:00 - Assembly

Parking lot - Canopy

9:15 - Assembly

Parking lot - Canopy

10:30 - Assembly

Parking lot - Canopy

for our principles than to live up to them.” No, truly loving what is good requires actively doing what is good!

A part of our problem here is that we tend to judge others by their actual performance, while we judge ourselves by our ideals. We think of ourselves as being fairly “good” because we know that our goals and intentions are good. We may not be doing much about our goals, but we render a favorable verdict on ourselves anyway, because we know what we are capable of doing, what we are going to do in the future, etc. But the person who truly loves what is right is not merely the person with high ideals and positive potential — he is the actual doer of good. When there is mercy to be shown, Jesus’ commendation falls upon the person who loves mercy enough to show it, making a personal sacrifice if necessary in order to do so.

Talk is cheap, as the saying goes. So, in a certain sense, are our intentions. Can do and have done don’t even live in the same neighborhood. “To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin” (Jas. 4:17). Loving what is right demands that we do more than complain about the world going to the dogs while we watch the evening news from the comfort of a recliner.

Tempted and Tried

Bubba Garner

We are assured that trials will come. “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12). There is no loophole or exemption clause; there is no way around it. In fact, Peter says not to be surprised when they come upon us, “as though some strange thing were happening” (1 Pet. 4:12). And James prepares us not for “if” they happen, but “when” (Jam. 1:2). Seeing that we cannot escape these “various” trials, coming in different shapes and sizes, often from unexpected sources, what can we do about them?

Cheer up. What does James say to do? “Count it all joy” (Jam. 1:2). How does Peter tell us to respond? “Keep on rejoicing” (1 Pet. 4:12). Jesus Himself preached in the Sermon on the Mount that when people insult you and persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you, “rejoice and be glad” (Matt. 5:11-12). Do you see a pattern developing here? If you want to end with joy, you have to begin with joy.

Yet, we would much rather “count it all misery” or “keep on complaining” or “pout and be angry.” We want people to know when we’re suffering and how much we’re suffering. We find greater comfort in feeling sorry for ourselves than in finding ways to rebound and rejoice. We must start seeing things from God’s perspective instead of our own limited, selfish view. Only then, will our eyes be opened to a whole new world. Only then, can we see Him on His throne, watching over us and causing us to rejoice. In prosperity and in adversity.

Look farther along. The testing of our faith “produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (Jam. 1:3-4). An athlete endures the rigors of training because he knows it will make him a stronger for the contest. We must persevere through our fiery trials knowing that we will emerge sharper and more durable on the other side.

God is interested in making His people better. Trials and tests are just one way He can accomplish that. He knows that they give us confidence and boldness for future trials. He knows that they help us become mature, “perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” He knows that a faith tested becomes a faith perfected. Bad things may happen to good people. But with the right attitude and proper perspective, they can make good people even better people. Let the Lord help. “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God” (Jam. 1:5). There are times to pray for the trial to be removed. But there are also times to pray for wisdom to endure it. Wisdom will help us see the end result, even when it’s still far way. Wisdom will help us make good choices in the midst of adversity. Wisdom will help us maintain our faith in God though we be in the most desperate of circumstances.

God gives to all generously. He will not only fill your cup, He will cause it to overflow. Pray for wisdom. Then use it.

“Cheer up, my brother. Live in the sunshine. We’ll understand it all by-and-by.”



Read your Bible daily