

## 3 Simple Rules: “Do Good to the 6<sup>th</sup> Power!”

### 3 John 2-8, 11

<sup>2</sup>Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul. <sup>3</sup>I was overjoyed when some of the friends arrived and testified to your faithfulness to the truth, namely how you walk in the truth. <sup>4</sup>I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

<sup>5</sup>Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the friends, even though they are strangers to you; <sup>6</sup>they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on in a manner worthy of God; <sup>7</sup>for they began their journey for the sake of Christ, accepting no support from non-believers. <sup>8</sup>Therefore we ought to support such people, so that we may become co-workers with the truth.

<sup>11</sup>Beloved, do not imitate what is evil but imitate what is good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. <sup>12</sup>Everyone has testified favorably about Demetrius, and so has the truth itself. We also testify for him, and you know that our testimony is true.

~ A Conversation with Fred Keller ~

Gary: Fred, in all the time I've known you I've always admired the way you have drawn upon some of the key teachings of John Wesley. One of those ideas was that we are to go on to perfection, a thought he picked up from what Jesus told us to do! Another idea central to Wesley was that we are to do good – that, as James says, faith without works is dead. Our theme today is on "Doing Good in all the ways you can" – why does that strike a chord in you?

Fred: One of the most comforting bible verses I know is found in Ephesians(2:8) “For grace we are saved by faith!”. What a relief! It isn't what we do, it is what we believe that counts! In effect God tells us welcome, come through the door! And as we do that we are greeted not with a list of “shoulds” but with a list of opportunities! We can do anything we want to do to advance the kingdom! It is up to us. And on the other side of the door is John Wesley, not wagging his finger at us but handing us a simple list of what living is all about: “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.” He never says do something you can't do! He never says do it till it hurts, he never says do it or else! He simply says do what you can. And that always makes me rethink. Could I do better? Could I do more? Exhausting just thinking about it isn't it? When do I get to have fun? When do I get to do something for me? Can't I ever not be stressed about helping others? Wesley would say – “of course you can! But just get a little better at it each time as you March on to perfection!

Gary: So if "doing good" is a concern of our hearts, then we also need to focus on

learning how to do things better. How do you embody that in your life and vocation?

Fred: Well as a manufacturer, we learned an important skill starting back in the 50's and 60's. We used to believe that there was one best way to do something. We had time study engineers figure out the right moves, make up a set of rules to follow and then chastise someone when they didn't follow the rules. Then along came the Japanese automakers in the 80's and they taught us something that a couple of American engineers taught them. Edwards Demming and Joseph Juran went over to Japan after the second world war and taught them the concept of continuous improvement. This concept fit well with the culture in Japan and eventually we picked it up over here. The basic idea behind continuous improvement is that you never arrive at perfection. You are always tinkering with a better way. Work is standardized along best practices and then when a better idea is found, it is tried out and if it is indeed better it is incorporated into the standard work until another improvement is found and it is added as the standard. And so on. Always improving, always moving toward perfection, but never there. I think that is exactly what John Wesley had in mind. I think of him as the original Mr. Continuous Improvement!

Gary: It's clear that in your professional life you live by Wesley's rule of "Do all the good you can, By all the means you can, In all the ways you can, In all the places you can, At all the times you can, To all the people you can, As long as ever you can." It can sound either exhausting or exhilarating! How does that "rule" work within the world of your personal faith?

Fred: The operative word, Gary, is "Try" to live by Wesley's rule. He sets a pretty high bar! For me it is an interesting puzzle to try to see how far I can go toward perfection. You never reach it, but that doesn't remove the imperative to try. It can be exhausting, but then you aren't following the rule "as much as you can"! We have to be healthy in order to do more. It is like that advice given on every flight "put your own oxygen mask on before assisting others". We need to continue to strive to be better, do better for as many people in as many ways as we can. It is a puzzle that never ends, but is really quite fun. The benefits are rewarding – fun to know the good that is being done in the name of Christ in a way that he would support. Service over self is a wonderful Christian ethic. If it were practiced throughout today's business world we would not be in the mess we are in today. As we enter into the debate that is sure to unfold this year, will we be favoring regulation or free enterprise? Well I think the answer should be running business on Christian principles. If we were truly self-less we would not have to worry about regulation and we would indeed have more free enterprise.

Thank you, Fred, for your faithful discipleship. It's quite simple when we put it in the equation that we find in John's Epistle. "Beloved, do not imitate what is evil but imitate what is good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God." We Protestants always harken back to what the Apostle Paul said about salvation: "We are saved by grace through faith." We are saved by God's gracious action in Christ, not by our efforts in trying to earn it. We can never climb the ladder to heaven on our own.

*But!* And "but" is always the hinge word in these matters. But – if we're not even trying to do good, then that's a very good sign there is that we've resisted the work of God's grace within us. And if any person is consciously doing evil, you know they have turned away from the grace that could save them. Being saved by grace does not mean that what we do doesn't matter. It doesn't mean we can do whatever we want and it doesn't matter 'cause God's going to save us anyway. Baloney. If we do whatever we want, thinking we're "home" scot-free no matter what, all it means is that we've resisted the grace God would give us, squandered the gift God would give us. Life is consequential. What we do, matters. If it didn't, then why, for the love of God, are we told to do good over and over again by the scriptures, Old Testament and New?

This was crystal clear in Wesley's mind. He wrote: "No one sins because he does not *have* grace, but because he does not *use* the grace he has. Therefore inasmuch as God works in you, you are now able to work out your own salvation." God gives you grace. Do you use it? No one sins because she does not have grace, but because she does not use the grace she has. And so, as Paul said, "work out your salvation with fear and trembling." He does not say "You aren't capable of doing good, so forget about it!"

We do good because, clearly, we are instructed to. We do good because it matters. We do good because God expects us to use the grace given to us. And to say that we can't do good, that we should just not even try, that we're sinners and can't earn salvation, is a terrible misunderstanding of the doctrine of grace. The Apostle Paul certainly taught that we're saved by grace, not by works. But he also fought against the "antinomians" – those who said "We can now go and do whatever we want. We're saved! It doesn't matter what we do!" Paul was furious against that heretical mis-understanding. Jesus, as much as he chafed against the legalism of Pharisees, and re-grounded the commandments in love, also very clearly maintained that he had come not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it, every jot and tittle. Jesus is the one who said "Don't simply do good to those who love you. Do good to those who hate you." Jesus is the one who told us "Go and be perfect, just as God is perfect." And what do you think "perfect" means? Do you think Jesus

thought we could be perfect by doing nothing? By not even trying? Ha! He'd have a good laugh at that. Jesus, all the time, spoke in terms of the importance of what we do.

If Jesus and Paul both seem to think that what we do matters, then what kind of fool would say otherwise? "No one sins because he has not grace, but because he does not use the grace he hath. Therefore inasmuch as God works in you, you are now able to work out your own salvation."

Okay. What if we said that doing good doesn't matter? What if Dr. Dale Williams of our congregation didn't think doing good matters? What if years ago, when Dale entered a camp of refugees fleeing the genocide in Rwanda, he didn't feel the need to respond faithfully to the need he saw? What if he doesn't have the resolve to which led to building and equipping six high schools, one primary school and four medical clinics, and support an orphanage, in Rwanda? And because those schools are in rural areas without electricity, he doesn't respond to the need for lighting there, so he doesn't invent his solar powered flashlights which have just arrived for use there? And he doesn't hire a number of people from our Jobs Program to put them together, thus providing them with income they never would have had? What? Doing good doesn't matter? God will save you.

Doing good doesn't matter? What if Fred Keller didn't have the impulse of grace within him to help previously unemployable people gain job skills and to put systems into place to enable them to stay employed? What if Fred didn't have his good and worthy concern for sustainable business and the health of the environment God created for our subsistence? What if instead of his concern to "go on to perfection," and instead of building new clean-energy wind turbines, and instead of responsibly using and recycling our natural resources, he wantonly polluted the environment, exploited workers, and turned a cold shoulder to the social ills that surround us? Why worry, Fred? You're already saved! Why should "doing good" matter? You don't need to use the grace, the gifts, the talent God has given you!

For several years now, we have recognized members of our congregation with what we call our "Faith and Action Recognition." Faith and Action. Hmmm. Our actions matter. By our actions we do good. We set an example for others. We come to see what is possible by our faithfulness and constancy in following Jesus Christ. Take a look at the names on the plaque in the Parlors and thank the people you see listed there.

And what about all the rest of us? Doing good is well within our grasp. Not that we have to do anything, of course. We could just sit lazily upon our duff and do nothing! Why not? Are we not saved? Should it mean anything to us that Micah says, "Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God"? Should it

concern us that Romans 2 says, “God will repay according to each one’s deeds: to those who (are) patiently doing good... he will give eternal life; while for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury”? How are we to take it when we receive very specific instructions such as “Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another”?

I think we need to realize that the scriptures mean what they say. God gives you grace. For the love of God, use it! Don’t abuse it. Do good. What else is there for you to do? If it is not your intention to do good, what are you intending to do? If you’re not headed toward the perfection God intends for us, for what are you striving? Mediocrity? Aim for the highest and the best you can do.

John Wesley taught that what we intend – and do – matters. Bishop Rueben Job gives us a simple summary of Wesley’s way in three easy lessons: “Do no harm, Do good, Stay in Love with God.” It matters that we do our best to do no harm. Will we be perfect in avoiding harm? By no means. But, as Fred say, we’ve got to try. We can’t just say “We can’t do it, but ‘no worries,’ God saves us anyway.” We must strive to do good, and to be better than what we are, knowing that it’s pleasing to God. We already know we won’t do all possible good, but that doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t try to do all the good we can.

In doing good, we can certainly take our lead from Wesley. When John Wesley saw thirty thousand orphan children homeless on the streets of London, when he saw dogs and cats being tortured for sport, and when he saw factories with no rules, he said, “If we’ve read the Bible methodically, we must address these issues.” Wesley not only preached methodical Bible study, he preached it so forcefully that all thirty thousand of those children were taken in by families and adopted; factories developed rules including child labor laws; hospitals were built; and instead of being tortured animals became pets.

Wesley and his movement founded numerous schools for the poor and homes for orphans, as well as churches. The movement emphasized visitation with prisoners and evangelism to all. As a result, British Methodists supported prison reform and opposed slavery. In addition, they established schools and medical clinics for the poor throughout Britain. And remember: this was a spiritual and not a political movement.

J. Warren Breedy, a secular historian, wrote the book, *England Before and After Wesley*, and in it he declared: “England was spared the bloody revolution of

France because the followers of John Wesley transformed society. Wesley returned to England its soul.”

Use the grace you have. Doing good matters. The scriptures instruct us to do good. I’ll tell you that, absolutely, you are saved by grace through faith. But I’ll also boldly declare that “doing good” will never put your salvation at risk. In truth, doing good is the best evidence that you are using the grace that God has given you. Doing good is the best evidence we can have that you have not turned a deaf ear to God. Doing good is the sign that your faith is not dead.

Isaac Owens was the first commissioned Methodist in California, and the founder of the University of the Pacific. He died suddenly when he was 57, the age I’ll be in a couple of months. He was once asked for an autobiographical sketch of his life, and this is what he wrote: “Isaac Owen was born in Vermont; raised in Coon Range on White River in the wilderness of Indiana; costumed in buckskin; fed on pound cake; educated in a log schoolhouse; converted to God in the woods; licensed to preach on a log; first circuit embraced a part of five counties. Last heard of, a missionary in California, and on a review of his life, has no apologies to offer for having been born!” May we all be able to say that about our lives when we come to that day: I have no apologies for having been born!

So give it a try!

“Do all the good you can,  
By all the means you can,  
In all the ways you can,  
In all the places you can,  
At all the times you can,  
To all the people you can,  
As long as ever you can!”

*May we pray?* Lord God, you have equipped us for every good work! Why did you do that? Could it be that you desire us to do good? By your Holy Spirit, grant us grace sufficient for all you desire us to do. Grant us the wisdom and courage to live faithfully the days which we are given. Give us strength to resist evil, do justice and act mercifully as we walk humbly with you. In all ways, may we use the grace you give us to your glory, this day and always. Amen!