

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: September 29, 2013

Pursue The Good Toward One Another

by Dan Trygg

“...at all times seek after/pursue the good for one another and for all people.”

I Thessalonians 5:15

“Let love be without hypocrisy, ...loathing the evil, joining oneself with the good.”

Romans 12:9

“So then, as we have opportunity, may we work the good to all people, but especially to those who are of the household of the faith.”

Galatians 6:10

What is “good”? The Greek word covers several ideas. It means what is **morally upright**, as opposed to what is evil or unrighteous. Goodness also implies **generosity, nobility and a willingness to help** others. It is not just *theory*; it is *practical*. The word for “good” also refers to what is **sound or healthy**, in contrast to what is bad, sick or spoiled. It can mean that which is **beneficial**, rather than what is wasteful or destructive. It can describe what **works properly** and is serviceable, rather than what is broken or does not operate as it should. Finally, the “good” is that which is **pleasurable and satisfactory**, rather than unpleasant or empty. **A good person will be an active, generous, upright individual, one who serves and benefits others.** Such a life will not only *bless others*, but *will also bring satisfaction and fulfillment to the person who lives in this manner*. When Paul said that we are to pursue what is good for one another, he is implying that **we ought to treat each other with the generosity, kindness, helpfulness and purity of heart that produces true benefit, health and blessing.** This is not just “benefit” as the world may look at it. It is consistent with the moral character and heart of God. True benefit will bring us into His will for the person.

Sometimes, people do not really know, or want to acknowledge, what is truly “good” for them. They prefer a *lesser* objective, an *immediate* pleasure or benefit that really does *not* promote health, soundness, moral goodness or long-range fulfillment, at all. **Not everything that looks good, really is good.** It may offer a temporary satisfaction, or escape, but in the end it costs *more* than it benefits. In reality, it is *not* good. It is unhealthy, even destructive. Or, **we may think something is “good” because it benefits us, but in the larger picture of the human need around us, or in light of the purposes of the Kingdom of God, it is actually selfish, evil and dishonoring to God and those made in His image.** **Goodness is not just in the eye of the beholder. There is an absolute and correct understanding of what is good. That comes down to “What does God want me to do with my life?”** Ultimately, we will have to answer to Him for what we *have*, what we *do*, what we *want*, and how we choose to live. I bring this up to point out that **discovering and living out “the good” can easily become a deep and complicated endeavor.** Thankfully, the Lord does not want us to *overthink* this. **God wants to develop a relationship with us where we learn to receive direction from Him. His will for each person is “the good” we are to help bring about.**

The “one another” responsibility we are studying this week is to “pursue the good unto one another and for all people”. **Again, the nature of the reciprocal pronoun means that the action is to go both ways.** *I* am to pursue the good on *your* behalf, and *you* are to be doing the same for *me*. Just think for a minute what that would do. **Can you imagine being part of a group where people were going out of their way to look out for *your* needs and interests, to treat *you* with generosity, kindness, and *do whatever they could* to bring about true health, wholeness and practical blessing in *your* life?** Ok, then turn that around. **Can you imagine the possible benefit *you* could bring to someone else if *you* really applied yourself to pursue what was for *their* good?**

Many times there are things we just can't bring about on our own, but if someone else would help us, we could make it happen. If we were all watchful for how we could help or benefit one another, *together* we could accomplish a great deal. *It is often because of selfishness, or self-focus, that people remain stuck or in need, when so many of the rest of us could easily give them a boost, or help them with a skill, or introduce them to a friend who could help them find work, etc.* **The Christians in the NT church really understood this concept, and applied themselves to benefit one another. People stepped up to help with practical needs, and everyone benefited.** The poor were cared for. Those who served experienced the joy and grace that comes with obedience and helping others. Others could see the practical help, the visible acts of goodness and generosity that met specific, concrete needs, and they could not help asking, “What motivates these people to be so good and gracious?” Jesus said, “They will *see your good works*, and *glorify your Father* who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). **Consequently, the preaching of the good news came to curious, interested hearts. People gave their lives to serve Jesus Christ, and the church spread rapidly.**

How often are we to “pursue goodness toward one another”? *Always.* The Greek word is a compound word, meaning “at every then-moment”. At *every opportunity*, we are to desire to benefit one another. As we *have opportunity*, we are to *act* to do good and beneficial things on one another's behalf.

The word translated as “pursue” (Gk. - *diōkō*) is an interesting and significant choice, here. It *can* be translated as “seek” or “pursue”, but it is not the normal word used for “seek”, “search” or “look for” (*zēteō*). It occurs 45 times in the NT. 32 times it is translated as “persecute”! Of the other 13 times, it is almost always translated as “pursue” (Lk. 17:23; Rom. 9:30,31; 12:13; 14:19; I Cor. 14:1; Phil. 3:12,14; I Thess. 5:15; I Tim. 6:11; II Tim. 2:22; Heb 12:14; I Pet. 3:11). **It is clearly referring to more than mere mental activity or observation. It would be better translated as “chase down” or “run after”,** to more effectively communicate the action-oriented nuance of the word. I Peter 3:11 is a good passage to illustrate this more intensive, active flavor of the word. There, the one seeking God’s blessing in life is encouraged to “seek (*zēteō*) peace and pursue (*diōkō*) it.” Or, “*look for peace, and chase it down*”. So, we are not *just* to “keep our eyes open” for opportunities to do good for one another. No. We are to *pursue opportunities to do good*. We are to be “hot on the trail” and “relentlessly chase down” ways to benefit one another, and *do* these things. This goes beyond even Paul’s advice to Titus, to remind the believers “to be ready/prepared for every good deed” (Tit. 3:1), or to “have in mind to engage in good deeds” (3:8). Here, in I Thess. 5, Paul is saying **we should actively chase down opportunities to be helpful to each other.**

Note, too, that this pursuit of benefiting others does not end with the Christians. We are to do good to one another *and to all people*. We are not *just* to help other people because they are “part of our Christian club”, we are to actively represent the grace of God by extending love, service and sacrifice to everyone, even “outsiders”. Jesus *especially* pushed this point. **We are to go beyond reciprocity, or an expectation of being “repaid” for doing good** (Lk. 14:12-14). **We are to go so far as doing good to those who not only don’t deserve it, but who even mistreat us** (Matt. 5:38-48). When we love those who love us, we are no different than the world. Or, when we help those we expect will repay us, again, even the unbelieving world will do that, at times. **When we help and do good to those are evil, or who cannot repay us, then we display something of the grace of God.** We come to be like our Father in heaven who gives His rain to both the just and the unjust. Instead of *being overcome* by their mistreatment of us, we can *overcome evil* by showing them goodness (Rom.12:21). **It is because the Church has lost its radical zeal to give and serve that we have lost our ability to shock, disarm and captivate the hearts and minds of people** in our day.

The second passage at the top of this study supports this. “Let love be unhypocritical; abhorring the evil, holding fast to the good...” I would have initially thought of this in terms of theology and morality. I would have thought it was about having right thoughts, ...about doctrine and ethics. When you look at the context, however, it becomes clear that **this is a call to action, not armchair discussions and theory.** The sentence Paul wrote extends through verse 13 without a break. **The one, simple sentence within this paragraph is “Let love be un-fake”. All of the other clauses in verses 9-13 are applications of that one command.** Almost every clause has a participle, an “-ing” word, describing the *activity* that unphony love would exemplify, e.g., outdoing in honor, ...boiling in the Spirit, ...serving (as-a-totally-committed-slave) the Lord, ...rejoicing in the hope, ...persevering in the affliction, ...continuing-unremittingly in the prayer, ...sharing in the needs of the saints, ...pursuing (‘chasing down’) hospitality (lit., the love of strangers). The word translated as “abhorring” (*apostugeō*) means “having a strong dislike of someone or something, implying repulsion and a desire for avoidance; to loathe or be disgusted by”. It was used as an intensive expression for separating oneself from someone or something. The word translated as “holding fast” is not normally rendered that way. The word here is *kollaō*, meaning to “join closely unto; unite with; become a follower of”. It was used by Jesus to describe the process of a man “uniting with” a woman to become a married team (Matt. 19:5). It refers to a person “joining himself to someone” to take a position of employment (Lk. 15:15). In Acts 5:13 it is used to describe people “associating with” the Christians (cf. 9:26; 10:28), and in 17:34 it was used to describe converts who “joined” Paul and his company. This implies more than a membership role. It involves a commitment to follow and stay involved with. In Rom. 12:9, then, “let *agapē*-love be unphony, being-repulsed-by-and-separating-from-the-evil and joining-oneself-to-and-following the good-and-healthy”. Not only are we to be turning away from evil and holding to good in our *thoughts*, we are to be leaving degenerate and ruinous *behaviors* in order to pursue and live out what is beneficial and healthy. In the context, this is *clearly* action-oriented, not just a thought process. It is a call to *action*, a call to leave and cleave, ...join, associate with, and serve alongside of. **We are unhypocritical when we leave the evil and join-up with the good and healthy by actively giving ourselves to live out the good in our day-to-day lives.**

The Galatians 6 passage adds other insights. “As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, *especially* to the household of the faith.” **First, there will be “opportunities” or “seasons” where we can do some beneficial act for someone.** Ephesians 2:10 tells us that *God Himself will prepare these and bring them into our lives* at the right time. **We are to act when these moments come. Finally, while we ought to help all people, we ought to especially care for other believers.** If we want to have a corporate *witness*, we need effective corporate *service*. The early church ministered to the poor *among them*, and *then* reached out to those around them. **Sometimes the desperate needs of others may eclipse the needs of our own. God’s goodness will reach to all, but not ignore His own.**