

Dearly loved children of God,

Nothing brings greater satisfaction to our lives than doing good for the Lord's sake. Nothing fills your life with more purpose than knowing that God is smiling down on you as you do your work—no matter what kind of work it is. Whether you're a minister, a teacher, a trucker, a tradesman, a student, a homemaker, a person who works in an office or one who works outside, and even if you are retired, this Scripture has implications for you. God doesn't call each of us to do the same job. We all have different jobs each day. And we all have different responsibilities within the church. But regardless of what we are doing, we need to do it in the confidence that God is smiling at us, that He's backing us up, and that He's well-pleased with our work.

As we listen to the Apostle Paul teaching the Galatian Church, he is filled with encouragement for believers to do good in their lives. To sow good seed and to not become weary in doing good. Doing good is the calling of all Christians. Doing good out of gratitude for all that Christ has done for us. That order is essential. The good we do flows from the immense good that our Lord Jesus has done for us. He—and He alone—saves us from our sins. Salvation is completed by Jesus. And our gratitude for this salvation leads to a response of service, good works, or a whole life dedicated to saying “thank-you” to Jesus by glorifying God and loving our neighbours.

This is the whole point of the Heidelberg Catechism's third section. After considering our sin and then the amazing work of Jesus in saving us, it now proceeds to talk about good works. This is our response to Jesus' saving work on our behalf. We are saved by grace alone. Nothing more is required for salvation. Jesus has done it all. However, we are saved unto good works. That means that after we are saved by grace alone, we are filled with gratitude that overflows in the form of good work that we do every day. It's not a specific kind of deed. No, it's every day living. Doing good in our workplace, at home, everywhere.

Paul's concern for us all is that we do our work for the Lord without getting burned out or bummed out. He wants us to do good and like it. That's why he writes to his sisters and brothers in Galatia saying, “Let us not become weary in doing good.” Or as another translation says it, “Do not grow slack.” In a positive tone, Paul seems to be saying, “Do good and enjoy it.” That's the way it should naturally be after we've been supernaturally saved and changed by Jesus!

That said, even for the best Christian, this command can be challenging at times. We all can become weary of doing good. I believe that when Paul talks about not growing slack or weary, he's talking about what Martin Lloyd Jones, in his commentary, calls “the danger or the middle period.” Let's think about that for a moment—that middle period.

The early church was made up of all new Christians. Some, of course, had been reared in the teachings of the OT. They were Jews. The Gentiles by contrast heard about the Lord God for the first time from preachers like Paul. Everyone—whether Jew and Gentile—had to put faith in Jesus. As time passed, the newfound faith became familiar and the initial excitement wore off. The Galatians, who began their Christian lives with great enthusiasm and looked forward to the promised return of Christ any day, worked for Him as though every day might be their last on earth. They served the Lord and their neighbour with great joy and without weariness. But the greater the time since their conversion and the longer they waited for Christ to return, the more the people lost their initial enthusiasm and zeal for the cause of the gospel. Our good works can become motivated more and more by obligation instead of by gratitude for Christ's work on our behalf!

Instead of staying focused on loving God and their neighbour, people grew weary. The church started to dwell on differences between Jews and Gentiles. They started to equate one tradition with God's will and drive wedges of division between each other. They lost their focus and no longer served God or their neighbour with joy. Grace was replaced with law. That's one of the dangers of the middle period. We lose sight of Jesus and start focusing on other things and our differences with other people.

Considering that, then, we need to be aware of the dangers of the middle period. Most of us here have been raised in the church and have been Christians for as long as we can remember. But I suspect we all have had times in our spiritual journey when the Lord seemed closer than at other times. Those are the times when you feel focused on Jesus and sharing yourself with others comes naturally, easily and joyfully. And similarly, when you think about the great day when Jesus comes back to gather all those who belong to Him, that creates a degree of excitement. What a wondrous day it will be to gather with believers from every century to praise the Lord and we'll all be one. That makes us want to begin living like that now. But if we get stuck in the rut of the middle period, we may become discouraged and weary because we have lost our initial zest for Jesus and it could be a long time yet before He comes back. And so our excitement may fade. That's the danger of the middle period.

The catechism reminds us that we do good for God's glory, to strengthen our own faith and to win our neighbours to Christ. Answer 86 wisely reminds us that in this middle period of losing our focus on Jesus, obligation becomes our motivation instead of true love for God and others. For example, we become so focused on our opinions that we forget to love our brother and sister like we did the day we first became a Christian and like we will when we live with them in heaven. That's what drove Paul to write the Galatian church about the bitterness that divided them only a few short years after a strong start. If we let our opinion of an issue become more important than loving a brother or sister in the Lord, then we lose sight of the Lord and we grow weary. When we become so absorbed with ourselves—making a living, doing this and that, going here or there—we forget to love our neighbour. We might still be doing some of the same things we did that

arose out of gratitude but now we are doing them for the wrong reason. So we fall into the trap of the middle period. And this is why we get tired.

Paul says that we should not become weary in doing good to one another, especially to those who belong to the family of God. God's goal for the Christian is to always love our neighbour. He doesn't want us to grow slack in doing good for any reason. Therefore it's always good to take our spiritual pulse with respect to good works. We do well to take inventory of our lives in the hopes that we can avoid growing weary in in doing good.

So let's reflect on what factors might cause us to grow weary. If we are encouraged not to grow slack, how does that slackness set in? What are the reasons for slackness?

Well, to begin with, some of us grow slack or become weary simply because we are tired. Physical exhaustion causes weariness. When we repeatedly neglect to take the needed break, we grow weary. Some Christians seem to think that God is a slave driver and if we aren't doing some work in the church or the kingdom in every slot of spare time we have, then God somehow will frown on us. So they do God's work but they don't rest which is also one of God's commands. And consequently they border on burnout. Instead of giving their all, they do the bear minimum with little enthusiasm. Something they once loved they now endure as hardship.

That is similar to what happened to Elijah after he defeated the 450 Baal prophets on Mt. Carmel. He had courageously pitted himself against the 450 and the Lord miraculously answered his prayer for fire and proved the Baal prophets to be false! As a result, all of Israel rallied behind Elijah and promised to serve the Lord. It was a spiritual high! Superhigh! Not much later, though, the once victorious prophet was so exhausted that he wanted to die! And God graciously ordered Elijah to eat and then rest. Elijah had grown weary. He couldn't go on because he needed a rest. Sometimes that's the case for us too. We've lost sight of Jesus. We're not resting in the joy of our fully secured salvation through Jesus, not responding to His grace with gratitude but pushing ahead to simply impress people or because we fear no one else will do what we're doing so we are grinding on out of obligation.

Secondly, and closely related to our desire to be busy, is a mistaken sense that we are invaluable. Sometimes the reason we feel we have to do something else in the church or in the kingdom is that we feel that we are the best at it and don't really believe someone else can do the job well. Our schedules may already be full, but we'll add something else to it because--well--no one else can really do that job as good as me. At issue is our pride.

But listen to what Paul writes in Galatians 6, beginning in v.3. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should

test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load.

The truth is that some Christians grow weary in doing good things because they are doing too much. They mean well. But they need to learn the joy of letting others do things too. They need to develop the grace of letting others try and make mistakes. They need to learn the joy of seeing others succeed at doing what they once did. It's a key to enjoying our good work. God doesn't intend for anyone of us to do everything. Just think of the passages that talk about the church as a body with each part doing its work. No one part does everything. That's why here Paul says that each one should carry his own load. Some of us may be tempted to carry more than our share and which leads to weariness and burnout. In such cases, our work has moved from being motivated by gratitude to most definitely being a burden we feel obligated to do.

So before jumping into more than you can really handle, think about your motives. Or as Paul says, Each one should test his own actions. Do you want to do something because you'd love to serve the Lord cheerfully in that area of ministry, or do you just think that no one else can do the job as well as you?

In that connection, those who are doing nothing or very little may need to heed the challenge of this passage as well and pick up the slack. Perhaps some are not carrying their own load and forcing others to do more than their share. We all need to test our motives--both for over-activity and under-activity.

A third reason we might become weary in doing good is that we are working on our own steam instead of relying on the Holy Spirit. Paul reminds us of this when, in v.8, he writes, "the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life." You and I can run ourselves ragged trying to help people or doing something good, but we may have the wrong motives. Rather than doing our work so that God will be honoured, we may fall into the trap of doing it to show people how great we are or how committed to something we are. Only when your motivation is Spirit induced gratitude can you test your motives and pass the test. Only the Spirit can allow you to take genuine pride in your work. You don't take pride in the work you do because you're better than someone else. But you may take pride in it. Paul says you should. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself without comparing himself to somebody else.... True pride comes from knowing that we have done what the Holy Spirit asked of us and empowered us to do. We don't take the credit for it. And we don't want the credit. We deflect all the glory to God the Holy Spirit.

When we do things under the direction of the Spirit and in the strength of the Spirit, then we have an unending supply of energy for the jobs that He wants us to do. Sometimes a lack of energy in one area may be the Spirit's way of leading us out of one area of good work and into another. If that's the case, we're wise to follow Him. When God has taught us what He intended in one area, then He often moves us on to grow closer to Him by doing good work in another area. We should

be open to the changes He has in mind for us and entrust the old area of ministry to someone else.

Working in our own strength and taking our eyes off the Lord is a sure way to become discouraged or weary in doing good. Doing good and liking it means we must keep our focus on the Lord and be open to what the Holy Spirit may plan to teach us in any and every situation we enter.

Every Christian at one time or another gives his/her all to some person, some program or some event and expects the Lord to bless that good ministry. And of course the Lord does. But He doesn't always bless the way we would. There are times when you may pour a lot of time and energy into someone only to have that person turn his or her back on you. And that really hurts. Situations like that have the potential to make you give up and become weary of doing good--even if the Lord asks it of you.

But when we see our good works in the light of God's good plan, then we always know He's going to make something good of it. When we surrender our lives to the Holy Spirit, then we also open ourselves up to the possibility of being hurt by people. It happened to Jesus every day. And similarly some people will reject our kindness or take us for granted for any number of reasons but that's the risk we take in offering our lives to the service of the Lord Jesus.

However, as we keep our focus on Christ, then we will not easily be discouraged because we don't do things to please people or to get personal recognition by others. We do them because the Holy Spirit asks us to do it. We do it because we are sowing seeds to please the Spirit who, Paul says, promises eternal life.

I get discouraged at times too. And I can get angry and think of all the things I've done that haven't been recognized. But then I have to remember who I work for. Why do I do what I do? If I sow good deeds to please man, then I might or I might not get the recognition I want. It depends on the person.

But if I sow to please the Spirit, then I am promised that I will reap eternal. The Holy Spirit will hold me securely and give me whatever I need and I will not grow weary. However, when I take my focus off the Spirit and put it on people I get discouraged and weary.

So as God's people, we need to keep the focus where it belongs: on God -- Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God blesses all the work we do selflessly in His name. Let the Holy Spirit be your endless supply of energy. Learn to let go when the Spirit says so and work with joy at those things that the Spirit calls you to do. Don't let other people's expectation or words motivate you. Heed the Spirit alone. And then work in the confidence that God is smiling down on you. In that way, you can do good and not grow weary. I suspect you'll even like the ministry you're engaged in.