

## GOOD FOR NOTHING

Has anyone ever said that you were good for nothing? Maybe a better question would be, have you ever said that someone else was good for nothing? There is a story that you may have heard about Dr. W. A. Criswell who was the longtime pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas. He was with a group tour in India and the group came upon a Hindu holy man who was seated (probably in a yoga position) and was staring into space. As the story goes, Dr. Criswell asked the tour guide about the man and was told “he is Hindu holy man.” Criswell then asked, “What does he do?” The guide was incredulous that anyone would ask such a question. His reply was “Do? He do nothing! He is holy man.” Dr. Criswell’s commentary on this was that in Christianity we have no such doctrine of being “good for nothing.”

This story is a good illustration of the doctrine that Paul wrote about in his letter to the church at Ephesus regarding our salvation. Most of us are quite familiar with and can quote Ephesian 2:8-9 which tells us

*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Eph 2:8-9)*

Paul goes on to tell us that we are saved for a purpose and that purpose is found in very next verse,

*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Eph 2:10)*

This passage is frequently used by many to encourage church members who have been saved by the grace of God to get involved in ministry since God has work for us to do in His kingdom. In other words we are to be good for something or to fulfill a purpose. While it is ever true that our church has needs for workers and all of us should be involved, we want to look at another aspect of being “good for nothing.”

Let’s look at the question of “what motivates someone to do the right thing?” Most of us can still remember the song about Santa Claus coming to town. How did it go? “You’d better watch out, you’d better not cry, you’d better not pout, I’m telling you why! Santa Claus is coming to town. The idea of this song is to remind

children to be “well behaved” so that they will get presents from Santa. Clearly the motivation for “being good” was to get the reward on Christmas morning. We could say that the child was being good **for a reason** as opposed to being good just for the sake of being good or being good without an ulterior motive such as getting presents or having good health, or whatever might be a desirable outcome.

Let me ask you this. Is it possible to be good without having an ulterior motive? Or is everything we do selfishly motivated? Let’s see what the Bible tells us on this question. Turn with me to Job, Chapter 1. In verse one we see.

<sup>1</sup> There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil. Job 1:1 (NASB95)

We are told that Job was a blameless and upright man. We would say that he had unquestionable character – no one could have found fault with him. We might also say that he was a man of integrity. This does not mean that he was perfect (in the world’s concept of perfection) because, being human, he surely made errors and missed the mark. His integrity, however, would not allow him to cover up such errors but to admit them and then to go on with life. This is what integrity is all about. In fact, integrity is an essential part of our salvation process that begins with repentance. It takes integrity to admit that we have a need to repent.

Not only did he have good moral character he was “religious” in that he feared or revered God and, either because of this reverence for God or simply because he was committed to doing the right thing, Job avoided doing bad things. How many times have you said or heard someone else say when presented with a possibility of going somewhere or doing something, “That just not right and I can’t or won’t do that.”

In the next four verses we see that Job was also a very successful person in that he had acquired a vast array of items of wealth in terms of physical possessions and he also was blessed with a large family. If one were to ask a person of that day what would it take for a person to be considered to be successful, many would have described Job’s situation.

The description of the activities of Job’s children might give us an impression that they were spending all their time partying. This was likely nothing more than siblings getting together to celebrate each one’s birthday. The cycle would likely be a year and once a year Job would send for his children to all come together and there he

would offer sacrifices for his family in case they had sinned (which was a certainty) during the past year. This was probably similar to the Day of Atonement observation that the nation of Israel practiced in their formalized worship system.

If this were a story on the Disney channel, the next thing we would say is “And everyone lived happily ever after.” NOT! Not so fast. This almost sounds too good to be true. As Paul Harvey used to say, let’s check out the rest of the story.

<sup>6</sup>Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. <sup>7</sup>The LORD said to Satan, “From where do you come?” Then Satan answered the LORD and said, “From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it.” <sup>8</sup>The LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.” Job 1:6-8 (NASB95)

This description of what was happening in the councils of heaven is unlike any other passage in the Bible. There was a meeting in heaven of “the sons of God” and we find an extra being who was called “the accuser” who also attended this meeting. The Hebrew word for “accuser” is the origin for the name Satan. If this is the same as Lucifer who led a revolt against God, then one might question how he would be allowed back into the realm where God dwells. Since this raises more questions than it answers we might not want to build a doctrinal system regarding what happens in the spiritual realm just based on this account.

If, for the moment, we assume that this is the Devil who is the prince of the power of the air, and had taken over the dominion of the earth that was initially given to Adam and lost by Adam when he chose to obey “the serpent” in the Garden of Eden, then he reported to God that he had been walking about in his dominion. All the descendants of Adam were subject to him and, consequently, they lived their lives in such a way that was akin to the nature of Satan which was prideful, selfish, and rebellious. Satan probably thought that he had it going his way with everyone under his control.

Not so fast, apparently, Satan had overlooked the man Job whom God Himself described as being blameless, upright, reverent to God and someone who avoided evil. Such behavior is certainly not in alignment with those who were under the control of the Devil.

<sup>9</sup>Then Satan answered the LORD, “Does Job fear God for nothing? <sup>10</sup>“Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. <sup>11</sup>

“But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face.”<sup>12</sup> Then the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.” So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD. Job 1:9-12 (NASB95)

Satan was not going to be outdone. He indicated that he was aware of Job and the protection that God had provided for Job and his possessions. Then came the **accusation**: the only reason that Job is good is because God is paying (rewarding) him for being good.

This raises an important question about motives of people: Is it possible for people to do things from a purely altruistic motive? If someone does a favor for you (provides help at no cost to you), do they have some selfishly driven agenda that is behind their action? Many have argued that this is **not possible** for a human being to do anything from a purely selfless motivation. Just based on casual observations, that assertion is generally true for most (if not all) people. Most of us have developed a somewhat skeptical outlook on things that we observe people doing. There are many things that have contributed to our being skeptical. One area that immediately comes to mind is that of sales promotions in the commercial realm. Even such things as the Publishers Clearing House jackpot is selfishly motivated in that it induces people to buy magazine subscriptions and it works because enough people think that their odds of winning will be increased if they buy the subscription.

Many of us have carried this same kind of thinking over into our “religious” practice. For example, if you ask typical church members why they tithe, then you are likely to hear something about God opening the windows of heaven and pouring out a blessing on those who tithe. I find that such thinking affects me. One of my favorite passages is Psalm 91 that tell us that “those who dwell in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the protective shadow of the Almighty.” I have made the argument that God’s protective shadow is like having an umbrella when it is raining. If you go out from under the umbrella, then you will get wet. Therefore, it is to our personal advantage to stay close to God. One might argue that even this is influenced by selfish motivation.

So, is the Devil right? Is it true that no one is good for nothing? How can you determine if it is even possible for a person to be good for no other reason than to please God and to be true to himself regardless of reward? We have all likely made the argument that blessings follow obedience and that goodness yields gratuity.

This is what I would call a general truth, in that it is generally true. What would happen if this general truth were suspended? Would anyone be obedient if the blessings were removed or would anyone be good if there were no gratuity? God was taking the affirmative side of this argument and Satan was taking the negative side. One way to determine which is right is “removal of the blessings and gratuity” from the one who was “obedient and good.”

This is exactly what the accuser proposed that God do. God’s response was “No, but I’ll let you do it.” Why do you think God did not do it Himself? One possibility is that Satan would have likely accused God of being too soft on Job and that would explain why Satan’s accusation did not happen if Job passed the test.

We are familiar with the account of Job losing all his possessions and all his children.

This account of losing everything seems so terrible that we may tend to dismiss it as something that could never happen to us. Yet when we see things such as the Tsunami that struck the coast of Bangladesh several years ago, the devastation of Katrina, the wildfires in the western states, Hurricane Sandy that wiped out homes and fortunes, the rash of tornadoes in the heartland and even the senseless shooting at schools and the indiscriminate terrorist bombings, then we see the reality of our vulnerability. We’ve heard the stories of worldwide economic depression in the 1930’s and when people today talk about the possibility of a global collapse of our current economy that is built like a house of card on printed money rather than on real wealth and we realize that it can happen to us.

Sometimes we hear testimonies that people give that say essentially what Satan was claiming. Many will tell you that when they started going to church or tithing or some other thing they should have been doing, that their life straightened out and they were rewarded for doing good. The real question of one’s faithfulness is how we function when the rewards are not there. If we have a good job and make lots of money, then tithing is not such a big deal. What happens though when times are tough and you are struggling to make ends meet, do we continue to tithe? It seems easy to do good and be saintly when everything is going well but the real test comes when times are hectic and we are unsure of what is going to happen next. What would our response be if we were to face such losses? How did Job respond?

<sup>20</sup> Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshipped. <sup>21</sup> He said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, And naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD.” <sup>22</sup> Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God. Job 1:20-22 (NASB95)

Satan said that Job would curse God. He was wrong! Job grieved his loss and there is nothing wrong with grief as long as we don't take up residence there. Instead of cursing God, Job fell down in worship before God. If we really believe God is Lord of our lives, then we must be willing to accept and to learn from the things that He allows to come our way. If we could realize that this life is **only temporary** and that we are **only passing through**, then we might realize that what we do in preparation for the next life is more important than material things in this life. Some have said that Job wrongly accused God of the evil that befell him when he said, “the Lord hath taken away.” We have to acknowledge that God did allow what happened to Job to occur and, knowing the nature of God, we have to assume that God allowed this to happen because of the eventual good that would come from it.

Job’s statement that he did not bring anything into this world when he was born and would take nothing away with him when he died gives us good insight as to how we should view physical possessions. Since we can’t take it with us, then we do not actually own it but simply have responsibility for possessions for a period of time. This same idea is captured in the parable of the talents that Jesus used to teach regarding the principles of responsibility and accountability. Job had been able to multiply that which had been entrusted to him and was able to enjoy the benefits of his efforts. But now something else was happening that did not make sense to him nor anyone else who believes in the general principles of fairness. It is good to remember that when things are happening that appear to be contrary to what normally happens, then we need to look for other factors and causes that are extraordinary.

Sometimes when such problems happen to people, we often hear them say that things are so bad that the only way the situation can go from here is up since it can’t get any worse. That is probably not a good assumption.

### Things Can Get Worse

If we look ahead to the first eight verses of Chapter two, we find that Job’s behavior vindicated God’s claim about Job, the man.

But Satan was not willing to give up. He proposed that it is one thing to lose possessions and even family but it is something entirely different when disaster strikes our physical health.

One of the things you have probably observed in life is that those who want to make changes that would appear to be away from Godly values is that they don't give up. Some of the things that Christian opposed for years have now come about such as liquor stores and liquor by the drink. The same thing happened with a state-run lottery. Legalized gambling, legalized use of marijuana, legalized prostitution, legalized pornography, legalized marriage to the same gender, and legalized abortion are realities in various parts of our nation. At the same time, we can no longer have the Word of God read in our schools, we can't teach morality because it sound like religion, we can't have public prayer and reference to Jesus is considered to be politically incorrect. Maybe we could learn something from the Devil. If we don't keep on keeping on, then we lose.

Satan knew what is really important to most people. How many times have we heard people say after a really bad disaster, "Well, at least we are still alive and we have our health." Speaking of health, people will generally spend whatever it takes to have some modicum of good health and to be free of pain. This is why the health care business is so lucrative. This is why the ultimate leverage for controlling a society is to be in control of the health care business. Satan knew that Job had passed the test of losing all his children and his physical possessions and saw that the only thing left was Job's health. The sickness that Job experienced was as bad as anyone could imagine. Not only was it painful, it was ugly and disgusting. So, what will he do now?

### Keeping Faith – 2:9-10

<sup>9</sup>Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!" <sup>10</sup>But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips. Job 2:9-10 (NASB95)

Sometimes, when things aren't going well, it seems easier to just give up. How many times have we looked at someone that was terribly ill and thought that death would be a blessing. This may have been the idea behind the advice that Job's wife had. She probably thought that it was hopeless. However, we see in Job the basis for all

our hope and that is our **faith in God**. Job confessed once again his relationship to God; that he was the servant and God is the Lord. Just learning that lesson will help us through the times in our lives when suffering comes.

How bad does it have to get to cause us to lose our faith? For some people it doesn't take much for them to lose their religion, but that is nothing but a temporary frustration. Losing your faith is to decide that all you've believed to be true was not true and that God is not good. Job's wife used the right word – integrity. Integrity is what holds us together. When a physical object lacks integrity, it literally falls apart because the various pieces are no longer interconnected. The thing that separates “people of faith” from those who are “faithless” is that they “hold it together” when trouble comes and those without faith “fall apart.”

If we can hold on to the truth that God is good and He is in control, then keeping faith is the only choice that one can logically make.

Job could keep faith with God because of his relationship with Him. That is the starting point for all people who want to be able to deal with what life brings our way. The way has been opened and Jesus has provided the means for our salvation by His sacrifice of Himself on the Cross. If we will repent and turn to God and simply trust that what Jesus did for us, then we can find that God will declare each one to be blameless and upright, one who fears God and avoids evil. If you have never put your complete trust in what Jesus did for your salvation, now is the time do just that. You may have made such a trust commitment before and want to renew or affirm that faith – the altar is open. You may need to talk with someone about life issues, whatever, the need, the Lord is sufficient. Pray with me.