

## Wesley's Three Simple Rules

### 3 Simple Steps of Grace #4

Acts 26:26-29

February 16, 2020 LUMC

Theme: We need God when we love others

We're working through 3 Simple Steps of Grace. They are simple, but we are taking some time to walk through them. They are the foundation of our Christian faith. Last week Betty Stewart shared some stories about our mission work from last year – wasn't that amazing? Did you have any idea that you had your hands on so many different aspects of mission? Lakeview is vibrant and active and you should give thanks to God for enabling you to do so much. Two weeks ago I shared the second circle of our triad, 'Love Others' and we talked about the biblical mandate to bring mercy, compassion and grace to the world. This week, we'll focus on Wesley's Three Simple Rules; Do no harm, Do good, Stay in Love with God.

One of the key scriptures from the third sermon is found in Leviticus 19:18, do not, "**seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.**" This week, we'll look at the notion of loving others without God in the picture and then come back to where our circles, Love God and Love Others overlap.

John Wesley and his three simple rules are reasonable guides to help us understand God's commands. The first two are pretty straight forward; first, do no harm. This is intentional work to make sure that our actions and words do not harm other people. But, we're human and not yet perfected so we have work to do and we need be ready to seek forgiveness and change where we are causing harm. This is not easy; racism, access to affordable health care, sufficient food resources, clean water, quality educational opportunity are just a few challenges we need to resolve. Much of this work is the focus of our missional work.

Second is, do good. Seems simple enough. In Scouting we say, "Do a good turn daily." I suppose the easiest way to understand this is to turn it around, "Don't do bad things, it's causes harm to others." Doing good lifts people up, helps the environment, restores people, places, and things.

Third is, stay in love with God. Well, Bishop Ruben Job penned that in his little book. "Three Simple Rules." Wesley actually said, "attend the ordinances of God." By this, Wesley meant; public worship, the ministry of the written Word of God, Holy Communion, family and private prayer, personally searching the scriptures, and fasting or abstinence. All of these are "spiritual disciplines" which help us know God, hear God, follow God, well, stay in love with God.

All three are external and keep us focused on the world around us, they keep us engaged in Christian action but the first two can be done without God. I know atheists who have adopted children for love of the "least of these." I know another who has turned away from God but sells wine and organizes wine tasting parties to raise money for water wells in underdeveloped countries. Alex is not yet a believer, but he was moved by the homeless near his neighborhood in downtown Phoenix, and for about 12 or 13 years, every Saturday he cooks a hot meal and provides it for about fifty people at the Justa Center. He takes the cans and builds robot sculptures he sells at art fairs to help fund the food. The rest comes from his pocket.

Some corporations do good. Walmart contributes \$250 for every 25 hours of charitable volunteer labor contributed by employees. ExxonMobile gives \$500 for 20 hours. Some take workdays to do charitable projects like sustainable neighborhood gardens and wells. The Flagstaff Police Department employees have built gazebos and a handicapped restroom at Scout Camp Raymond, repaired park facilities, and sponsored youth sports teams. Most cities sponsor neighborhood renovation projects that corporations support and send employees. Corporate social justice is good for image and for business.

All of this is to say, you don't need God if you want to do good. It's social justice and anyone can do it. I've also been on church-sponsored "mission" trips that were little more than secular social work; there was never a mention of God, Jesus, or the opportunity to share the good news. But, since God is the author of all that is good, this kind of work is evidence of the prevenient grace of God working through people, often without their knowledge or understanding.

You don't have to be a Christian to do good, but it helps. Christianity has contributed great artworks, volunteerism, public schools and universities, medicine and hospitals, protection of women and children, music, philanthropy, ethics, science, missions, water wells, literacy, capitalism, civil liberties, representative government, abolition of slavery, the transformation of lives, and the gift of salvation.

In Acts 26, we find the Apostle Paul in prison, brought up on sedition charges by the Jewish leaders and he now stands before King Agrippa, grandson of Herod the Great, and defends himself and proclaims Christ. The year is between 41-44 ad. At the end of his discourse, he tells King Agrippa, you know all about the prophets and what they said about the Messiah. He complements the king on his observations of the events surrounding Jesus.

Agrippa said, **"You think you can persuade me in so short a time to become a Christian?"** Paul responds by saying, **"Short or long, I pray that you and everyone listening may become what I am, except for these chains."** Paul acted out of love for others, including the king and that left him in prison. Agrippa knew who God is and still failed to act but Paul's words continued to work on him even as he left Paul's presence. God's word never returns void.

We ought to think about Wesley's three rules as the floor. It is the lowest level of loving others, a beginning place. You see, love is not a feeling – that is what culture wants you to believe. Wesley would say that faith without the acts is, "being almost a Christian." James 2:17, **"faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead"** and Hebrews 11 echoes that notion. Paul notes in Ephesians 2 that we are "created as God's handiwork – you are his best craftsmanship, saved by grace through faith to do good. Love is our faith lived out through action in daily life.

We know the good news of Jesus and when you stay in love with God and attend to his ordinances, the work we do becomes our natural response. Think of it as the Holy Spirit leaking out of you and onto the people you are serving. Peruvian priest, Gustavo Gutierrez developed "Liberation Theology" calling for healthcare, human rights, and economic fairness and it struck a chord in lands that have been oppressed

economically by corrupt governments and patristic society. But the danger lies in the exclusion of God from the liberation and the good works.

If we want to do social justice, we need a measure to know what is socially unjust. Friedrich Hayek noted that without God “there is no test of what is unjust.” Other arbitrary standards may be just as bad or worse.<sup>1</sup> Early theologians like St. Augustine, Thomas Pane, and Jesuit Priest Luigi Tabarelli each echo Jesus’ own command to go and love others as you love yourself but to do it by remaining in community and in God. Our measure is scripture and two thousand years of Christianity sometimes failing yet often succeeding.

No, you don’t “need” to love God to do good. But, when you attend to God and his teaching you fall into God’s love and his presence in you, the Holy Spirit, will compel you to share and that means good happens, there is no harm, and God is glorified. This is the intersection where God’s grace flows like a raging river over you and when you love God and you love others there is less you, more God. Remain in that intersection where you love God and love others.

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<sup>1</sup> FA Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty* (1973) vol II, ch 3