

# Jesus Christ Doing Good

by Charles Finney

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*Jesus Christ went about doing good because He valued the happiness of mankind and sought to promote it.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:16, Acts 10:38, Galatians 6:9

**Topics:** "Benevolence", "True Religion"

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## Description

Charles Finney emphasizes that Jesus Christ's mission was centered on doing good, healing the oppressed, and promoting the spiritual and physical well-being of humanity. He explains that Christ's actions were driven by genuine love and benevolence, not by duty or self-interest, and that true religion is about selflessly seeking the happiness of others. Finney argues that the joy of doing good is a fundamental aspect of true religion, and that believers should embody this spirit of benevolence in their lives. He warns against selfishness and encourages a life dedicated to the service and happiness of others, reflecting the heart of Christ.

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## Transcript

"Who went about doing good."--Acts, 10:38.

The entire verse of which the text forms a part, reads as;--"How God annointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed with the devil for God was with Him."

In treating of this text and the subject it presents, I propose,

I. TO NOTICE WHAT IS INTENDED BY THE LANGUAGE OF THE TEXT;

II. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN THE FACT AFFIRMED;

III. TO SHOW WHY CHRIST WENT ABOUT DOING GOOD.

I. The intended meaning of the language is obvious. Jesus Christ went about promoting the well-being of men wherever He went. He did what He could wisely do for the bodies of men, healing the sick, supplying physical wants; but more especially He sought to promote the highest spiritual good of the people, teaching, warning, rebuking and entreating, as circumstances seemed to require, evermore intent upon promoting the highest human happiness by every means in his power. His history shows amply how He did this.

## II. What is implied in his going about doing good?

1. It is implied that this was his business--the thing He had above all things else at heart. For this end He came into the world. He came to do good and not evil; to bless and not to curse; to fill the world with peace, love and happiness, so far as lay within the range of his influence. The good of man was the great object which He sought.

2. It is implied that Christ sought the happiness of mankind disinterestedly, in the sense that He valued their well-being, that He really loved it and enjoyed the efforts He made to promote it. He was truly and honestly benevolent. It was because He loved the happiness of men that He labored to promote it.

## III. I am to speak of the reasons or motives of his conduct.

These may be considered as either objective or subjective. The objective embrace the external object which creates a demand for benevolent action and becomes the exciting cause of internal benevolent purpose. The subjective reasons or motives are no other than the internal reasons--the grounds of benevolent action as they existed in the mind of Jesus Christ.

Negatively, the reason why He went about doing good was not his salvation. It was in his case no part of his object to secure or even use the means to secure the salvation of his own soul. There is no intimation that this was any part of his object.

Nor was He forced into this labor by a sense of duty. He did not move under the goading of conscience, pressing Him on in an up-hill business with the perpetual appliance--you must do this--you must do all you can. Not so did He labor. He went forward not because commanded; not because He feared any threatening;--not because some dreaded penalty hung in terror over his head.

It is no doubt true that Christ had respect to the fact that the law of his intelligence and the law of God also, required of Him benevolence. But mark;--it was not law merely that pressed Him up to this--not merely any external law;--I mean, external to his own mind and apart from the ruling purpose of his own will. The simple truth is, He had chosen benevolent action as the course of his life and as the law of his own voluntary existence. He determined to do this, and as I might say, He had voluntarily determined to love the doing of good to all beings, and thus had made this the governing law of his voluntary action.

Now we cannot exclude from such a state of mind the idea of duty. Every mind knows that such a state of mind is duty--is what God requires, and what the demands of the external universe require. All moral agents, acting virtuously act according to duty. Their inward purpose and their external acts, if virtuous, will correspond with God's rule of duty; and yet it is still true that a higher motive than a conviction of duty impels them onward. They pursue this right course of internal purpose and of external act because they have determined to be benevolent and to act benevolently, and because consequently they enjoy being benevolent, and not merely because God has formally required of them benevolence. A good man loves his neighbor as himself, and he knows this is duty and also knows that not so to love his neighbor would be wrong; but yet the internal law of doing good--made a law of his moral being by his voluntarily choosing it to be so, is the active principle from which in the last analysis his actions flow.

The benevolent mind regards the happiness of being as a great good. It seeks this good and voluntarily makes this seeking of others' good the great business of its own existence. Now I have heard people say that they regarded the idea of benevolence as a pure abstraction. Let them go and talk in this strain to a

mother. I wonder if the idea of benevolently seeking the good of her children, is a mere abstraction to her. Go and ask her if she really knows anything about devoting herself to her family. Tell her you believe that that idea is nothing better than a respectable abstraction. Tell her it may sound well in talk and might seem somewhat noble and self-sacrificing if it were only real; but assure her that nobody can ever have the least confidence in its sincerity--that all the world knows that every man and every woman too are supremely selfish, and there is no such thing in reality as loving others as ourselves, or as devoting ourselves to others good except so far as we can see selfish good resulting for our motive and reward. Go and talk to some simple-hearted mother in this strain. Will you convince her that she knows nothing about devotion to the interests of her children?

I can understand how this subject may perplex some minds. A young man said to me to day--"Does a selfish, wicked man understand what it is to be devoted to the good of others? Can he have any just idea of what this is?"

To meet this question, you may take that form of benevolence which we often see in ungodly parents. They know what it is to have their hearts bound up in the happiness of their children. Although in this very parental affection, their minds are in a perfectly selfish state towards God, yet this devotion to the happiness of their children is a positive reality to them--none in all the world perhaps is more so. Now just enlarge this idea; suppose this devotion which even ungodly parents feel towards their children were to expand the scope and range of its regards and embrace every neighbor--friend or foe; then all the men of one's nation; and next all the human family: would not this be essentially real benevolence?

Perhaps this mode of illustration may serve to explain the point in question as well as any that I can adopt. We all understand it to be a law of our being to love our offspring. This love is as truly natural in the human mind as self-love--the desire of one's own happiness. Now we can suppose this love of offspring to be enlarged so as to embrace others as well as our own children: nay, we can suppose it to be so much enlarged as to comprehend within its scope all the human family. Suppose we could unify all beings of whom we have any knowledge--comprehending them all within the grasp of our mind and the scope of our affection as if they were all but one person; then let us love that one person as we love our offspring or as we love ourselves, and we should have the idea of real benevolence, and then you would see that this idea of benevolence is no abstraction.

Benevolence an abstraction? Who can so regard it? A mere abstraction is it to promote the happiness of others! Was it so in the case of Jesus Christ? If it had been, would he have made his cradle in a manger and his death-scene on the cross, for human welfare? Or is it an abstraction in the case of those who labor and suffer for others good? If you can understand anything, you can surely understand that benevolence is no abstraction. What do you think of Jesus Christ going about doing good? Was the idea of benevolence in his mind a mere abstraction?

If we can have correct conceptions of anything, we can have of enjoyment and suffering. Understanding these things, we can also understand what is meant by putting away sorrow from all hearts, and pouring joy into the souls of all our fellow beings all around about us. What sort of a man must that be to whom this seems a very difficult thing to understand?

It is said of Christ--"Who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame." Observe, He had no special regard to his own personal happiness; this was not the direct object He sought; and yet He enjoyed doing good to others. He found a happiness in blessing others, which was not the direct object of

his search. His doctrine was--"It is more blessed to give than to receive." His state of mind was such that He enjoyed conferring happiness upon others, even more than they enjoyed receiving it. It was, in his state of mind more blessed for Him to give, than for those to whom He gave it to receive.

Thus when He met the widow at Nain--saw her sorrows; came up and touched the bier, and they that bare it stood still;--when in this affecting case He called this young man to life and restored him to his mother, although she enjoyed her restored son exceedingly, and could have gone dancing home with delight, yet he enjoyed it far more than even she did. The act met the demands of his own conscience and nature. He had given his heart up to the doing of good to others and consequently He felt more joy in doing good to others than they could in receiving it. Hence He could "endure the cross, despising the shame."

Again, there can be no doubt that Christ had a proper regard to his Father's feelings toward Him. Human fathers always enjoy seeing their children do nobly. When they send their children away on missions of love, and give them the parting kiss, and their parting benediction, saying in the fullness of their souls--"God bless you and make you do good as long as you live;" and don't want to bring them back, though trials and toils betide them;--and the missionary himself says, "I know this labor I am doing will gratify my aged father and my praying mother;--I will write them all that the Lord has wrought by me, for I know they will enjoy it exceedingly;"--you all see in this case that the toiling missionary is sustained in part by the hope of enhancing the happiness of his parents by his labors; and why should not Jesus have the same interest in the joy of his Father? God always enjoys the labors of love wrought by his Son; He had them all in mind from eternity. So also did Jesus have all these things in his mind. He knew that his self-denying toils would gratify all his friends in heaven.

Ah, say the self-denying missionary, I will write back to my Christian friends. They prayed for me when I left my native land, and they have been praying for me ever since. I know they must enjoy the knowledge of what the Lord has wrought by me in answer to their prayer.

Now this is not selfish; it is not being proud. It is a simple regard to the happiness of those left behind.

So with Christ. He knows that in heaven they are prepared to appreciate such tidings. There may be few on earth to appreciate them, but many in heaven. There were patriarchs and prophets--there were Abraham, Isaac and Jacob--there were a countless host who had been waiting long ages for this glorious consummation, and when they came to hear what Jesus was doing and suffering on earth, did it not enhance their happiness? Yea, was not the happiness of heaven increased even more than that of Jesus Christ Himself? O, what joy must have thrilled the hearts of the holy in heaven, when they were told what Jesus was doing--how He was raising the dead, healing the sick, casting out demons, preaching the gospel to the poor, saying to many a burdened soul, "thy sins are forgiven thee--go in peace;"--when these glad tidings, swifter than on telegraph wires, flashed from earth to heaven, was there no augmented joy there? When it was told them, Jesus is preaching salvation--is planting the tree of life all over the barren wastes of earth, rebuking hell, is about to set wide open the blessed gates of mercy, so that whosoever will, may enter and find life and peace--O, then was there not joy in heaven unknown before?

Hence in going about to do good to others, Christ had regard not merely to the immediate good He might do them, but also to other and higher interests. And had you been on earth to see and know those deeds of love and to enter into the sympathies of those whom he blessed--then also, into the sympathies of his own gushing heart, O, how rich the scene for a benevolent mind to enjoy! Was it, think you, an abstraction to Him? So far from this, it stirred up all the warmest sensibilities of his being; nay more, so great was his

zeal in this work that it literally ate him up! It actually consumed the vital energies of his physical being!

#### REMARKS.

1. How very simple and intelligible is the nature of true religion. Every man knows what it is to love to do good to some individual. Every person has some one or more objects of affection. Now suppose that selfishness were all put away--that we were to associate our own happiness most intimately with that of all our race, taking as much interest in each other person's well-being as in our own; could we not then understand this state of mind! This is real religion.

Devotion to other's good is a very simple thing. When our devotion to the production of happiness is not restricted to ourselves, but we labor for others' good, and love to promote the good of others not less than our own, this is an intelligible thing; and this is true benevolence--real religion.

2. You have revealed in our subject the state of mind to which the rewards of heaven are promised. These rewards by no means appeal to human selfishness; they were never intended to stimulate the selfishness of the human heart. God promises to reward those who live as He lives--who labor for the same ends. Suppose a father should promise his estate to his children on condition they should live as they ought to. Would this mean--If you are careful and anxious to get my estate, you shall have it? No, but it would mean this; If you regard my will and happiness, and if you try in all things to do right; if you love me, and love all the family, with a single eye, and prove yourself to be in every respect a worthy son--then you are entitled to my estate.

And would this be an appeal to their selfishness? By no means. No intelligent child could so understand it.

3. We can see to whom and to whom alone the rewards of eternal life are possible.

On this point selfish men are almost sure to mistake. They have erroneous views of what secures salvation. No man can be saved unless he enters into such sympathy with God as to find his own happiness as God finds his.

But what are these rewards of eternal life? Suppose a man makes a mistake and regards the whole matter of salvation as one of mere loss and gain, altogether a mercenary thing; is it not plain that he entirely misapprehends the subject? It were well that he should ask--What are these rewards? What were they in the case of our Lord? I answer--The joy of doing good--the joy of witnessing and enjoying the happiness of others, so that when He saw the results of his labors, they were their own reward and He could not but enjoy them.

Ere long all of us who have the spirit of Christ and of Paul shall get home to heaven. Then we shall see Paul. Now, and of a long time past he has seen the thousands, converted under his own personal labors--the fruits of all his toils and groans and travail; he sees and has long seen their intense happiness in God and in Christ, and he understands that these are his spiritual children, whom he has begotten in his toils and labors, and does he not enjoy their joys? While here on earth, he was always rejoicing; but O, how much more is he always rejoicing now! Now, having gone home, his works have followed him; and what are these works? The fruits of his pen and tongue--of his labors in his correspondence and in his oral preaching.

But on what conditions can these fruits of his labors make Paul happy? These are the very results for which he labored. He has been a successful man--successful in all his enterprises of labor for God and for

souls. As Christ sees of the travail of his soul and is satisfied, so Paul. Both are happy because they have attained the object for which they labored. The fruits are being gathered in the great storehouse of the Almighty. Age after age, they come, and though a thousand ages shall pass away, each freighted with souls saved, yet still they come. And is not this reward enough? Say, young man, is not this an ample reward for all the sacrifice and toil endured by Jesus Christ and by his servant, Paul? See the missionary who has gone to Africa. He rolls back the dark cloud of moral death that hangs over that cruelly wronged and morally neglected people. Many are they that learn of salvation from his lips and catch the new song of praise and love. By and by he gets through his work and goes home. His works do follow him. Year after year he sees them coming up to cast their crowns at Jesus' feet; and is not his an adequate reward? They had sympathized with Christ all along during their labors; they sympathize with Him not less now in these rewards of their labor. Christ enters into their joy, and they into his. And is all this benevolence an abstraction in heaven? Nay, verily; let it be anything else--but not an abstraction!

4. It is wonderful to see the astonishing blindness of mind which often exists as to real religion.

Often before my conversion did I pause and wonder what I was doing and what object I was living for. The very end of my existence seemed to be to me altogether vague and indeed unknown. I had no conception of the ends for which a Christian lives, and truly I could see no other ends of life worth living for.

I am afraid that some among you do not know at all what it is to be constrained by the love of Christ to labor and to suffer for the good of others and to be a co-laborer with Christ in the great labor of this world--the redemption of souls that else must perish.

5. Religion, to truly religious persons, is never a burden. Those who think so, know nothing yet as they need and ought to know. Of old the prophets were wont to say--"The burden of the Lord"--"The burden of the Lord;" and many seem to regard every message from the Lord as a burden, and all the work He calls upon them to do, as a burden. Young people say, We must by all means enjoy life now, and religion is utterly unsuitable to our age and to our pursuits. But how is this? Cannot the hearts of the young be warmed to love? Is it only the aged that have such hearts as love can warm and holy zeal inflame.

Yet how passing strange are the views of many as to early piety? Said a woman in Troy--"It seems a pity that my daughter should become a Christian now. She has just reached an age in which she can enjoy society, and mingle with pleasure in young company? O what a pity that all her pleasures should be spoiled!"

When I was converted, my brother had but one word to say about it--"Charles," said he "is ruined!"

So, often, people think that religion is far enough from being a present good. Yet what can be a greater good than to give one's self up to that in which we shall find most congenial, permanent and supreme satisfaction? But those who do not give up their very hearts to the joys of benevolence, do of course find it altogether an up-hill business.

6. People who are truly religious have no other joy but this. I mean, that all their joys are mingled with their religion. They can enjoy nothing without religion. They want to meet God in everything; then they enjoy it. But without God and without a benevolent heart in sympathy with God, they could not enjoy either food, or society, or study. All would lack its appropriate appeal to their sensibilities. Their hearts would refuse to go into it. They have one great object connected continually with all happiness. Their religion consists substantially in sympathy with Christ--in having the heart absorbed in the same spirit which Christ had.

Now if you read Christ's history and see how great, how deep, and how all-absorbing his interest was in his work, you will also see the real heart of all his true followers.

7. This is the religion of the saints of olden ages; of prophets, of apostles, and pre-eminently of Paul. He counted all things else but dross that he might win Christ and wear Christ's Spirit.

8. Those who do not thus devote themselves to the good of others deserve no good themselves.

How plain this is! One who knows the value of others' happiness, yet cares not to promote it; none who knows the miseries of his fellow-beings yet cares not to alleviate them, what claim has he upon either God or the universe for happiness? What could he do or enjoy in heaven? If he lives only for himself, what could he do there? Just think of him, carrying all his selfishness into heaven! A man once said on the floor of Congress--"The people in the North are so selfish that if they should hear of the river of life, their first thought would be to ask if there were any mill-seats on it!" How can minds so steeped in selfishness be happy even in heaven?

9. Some live to get and not to do good, and thus fail of the great object of life. If those who are living thus are not awake to their danger, they will get into so selfish a state that they will never enjoy anything--will never get anything to enjoy. If you live to get good, and do not try to do good, it will surely be your ruin! This truth should be reiterated again and again. It must be appreciated, or men will make shipwreck of their happiness forever.

10. It sometimes happens that persons who have been active and useful before they came into this place, suspend all active labors to do good when they get here. They say--"O there are men enough here to do all the good that need be done." Soon they tell us they can find nothing either to do or enjoy. They cannot enjoy nearly so much here as they used to elsewhere. This is the inevitable result of their course of life.

Young man, have you nothing to do for the spiritual good of your room-mate? Do you know his state of mind? "O, I presume," you say, "that he is in a good state." Do you know anything about it? O, you don't know. You have never asked him. Have you nothing to do? Look all round about and see. Will you reply, You are the minister and you can find enough to do; but what can I do? There is work for every man who will find a heart and a hand to do it.

Theological students sometimes make this great mistake. They expect to do nothing here, but put off their labors for the good of men's souls till they get through their studies and into their field. They could scarcely make a worse mistake. Thank God, all have not made it. Some have made a path-way of light all along their course. You hear of them--you see their luminous pathway; God is with them, and they labor for Him not in vain. The man who goes upon mission ground, having been useful here will be useful there. But if he has not learned to labor to effect here, he need not expect to labor successfully there.

11. The benevolent live to make others happy. In a thousand ways they show that this is the object of their lives. They love this work. They are not misanthropic, complaining, fault-finding, censorious; but joyful in their work, taking a lively interest in every body's happiness, enjoying all the good that they see done by God, and all they see done by good men. When they see great masses moving onward in the career of social and civil progress, ideas of civil and religious liberty developing, new channels and means of usefulness laid open, seeing these omens of progress, instead of taking somber views of things, they are hopeful and happy. They see much good already done, and in all this they rejoice exceedingly. They do indeed see some eddies in the mighty current of progress, and sometimes they see back currents; but yet

Christ carries on his work, and confiding in Him, they still believe in ultimate success, and still hold on their way hopeful and rejoicing. Jesus their great Captain, they know is not on earth but in heaven; yet though in heaven, He has not ceased to labor and to pray for his own cause. Indeed He is there because He can labor there to better advantage than here.

Hence all their prospects are full of hope. They lift up their eyes and see whole masses moving onward, and in this movement they cannot fail to rejoice. They are not the men to turn away from such a sight and mope along in dull and misanthropic melancholy. They do indeed see wickedness enough; but glory to God, Christ reigns, and will reign till He hath put all his foes beneath his feet. Jesus reigns and the trumpet of his gospel is being blown in all the earth.

It is astonishing to see how stupid many professed Christians can be in this matter of human progress. If they awake, they would stand on tiptoe to see the tops of the great thoughts and ideas of the present age of progress.

Young men and young women, what do you say? What are you here for, and what am I here for? For what object did your parents send you here? And what are all these teachers here for? All, to do good; surely there is no other object that deserves an hour of our time and labor. Are there those among you who do not know what this means? I am grieved and ashamed that men can live in Oberlin without having their hearts all on fire with the benevolence of the gospel of Jesus Christ!

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