

Helping God Out

by Robert B. Thompson

The sermon emphasizes the importance of obedience to God's will over the misguided ambition to help Him achieve results.

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5, Matthew 16:18, Luke 9:23, John 10:27

Topics: "Gods Will", "Spiritual Obedience"

Description

Robert B. Thompson preaches about the importance of seeking God's will and grace in our lives, rather than striving in our own strength to 'do great things for God'. He emphasizes the need to have a clear conscience before God, to be obedient to His leading, and to focus on being transformed into the image of Christ and finding rest in God's will. Thompson warns against presumptuous actions and urges believers to listen for God's voice and obey His commands, rather than relying on human efforts or management techniques to build churches and add members.

Transcript

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. (Matthew 16:18)

I came to Bible school fresh out of the United States Marine Corps. I became a Christian while in the Corps, and also was called to preach. By the time I went to the Pentecostal Bible school, about three years after having become a Christian, I was fairly well versed in typical Evangelical doctrine. I had not been raised in a Christian home.

There was a strong emphasis in Bible school on "doing great things for God." Today we would refer to it as "pushing the envelope." This means the greater the effort we made, the more souls that would be saved and escape Hell.

I am a conscientious person. I could not bear this kind of preaching. How could one ever relax knowing that during that period of relaxation souls were slipping into Hell by the thousands if not millions?

I remember one time a friend of mine named Jack Wallace and I were sitting in what used to be called a "revival meeting." This was on a Thursday. The evangelist challenged us to fast until Sunday so souls might be saved.

Jack and I agreed to do this.

By Sunday morning we were starved. We were walking down the main street of the city, as I remember, passing out tracts and seeing if we might get someone saved.

We passed a restaurant. Through the glass window we could see the pastor and his family sitting down to a meal!

Jack and I stopped at the next restaurant and ate something--I think it was pie. It felt like a cannon ball in my stomach. I can still recall that.

I learned something from this experience. All the preaching I had heard about souls going to Hell; how we were supposed to struggle over the last rice paddy with the Gospel until we fell face down in the water and drowned; how we were supposed to be willing to go forward on our knees over broken glass if necessary; how God was looking for someone who would go all the way with Him; how we were to "dare to be a Daniel"; how were to "burn out for Christ"; how we were to "do big things for God"; how the sheep were to reproduce other sheep, since this was not evidently the task of the pastor or evangelist; was so much talk. No one had any intention of burning himself out for Christ. It was just so much enthusiastic church talk.

I can't live like this, with a guilty conscience toward God. I'll bet you can't either.

I decided then and there I was going to go to the Lord and find out what He wanted me to do.

I made a deal with God: "Tell me what You want me to do, give me the grace to do it, and I will do it." I have stuck with that attitude through the years.

The Lord told me He loved me. He has never asked me to do anything that He has not provided the grace for. There have been difficult times; but everyone who has ever lived on the earth has had a difficult time or two.

But my conscience is clear. Each one of us can only do so much. Isn't that so? If we do what God wants us to do, we have peace with God. If we do less than this we will have our talent removed from us and be thrown into the outer darkness. If we attempt to do more than this we are guilty of presumption. The third temptation of Christ, that of being invited to leap off the roof of the Temple, is the test of presumption.

But taking the attitude of just doing what God directs us to do, means we believe God knows what He is doing and is in control of the world.

God is not looking for people to "do great things for God." This attitude toward God is nothing more than human ignorance and presumption. God asks only that we be obedient to Him.

The eleventh chapter of the Book of Hebrews, the "faith chapter," is a record of obedient people, not spiritually ambitious people who were trying to "push the envelope" to get God to save more people.

Indeed there are times when the Spirit of God burdens us to pray or to do something extraordinary. But this is a different matter from attempting to challenge God to act.

The Bible tells us to desire fervently the gifts of the Spirit. The Bible tells us to persevere in prayer. And I know from experience that we receive what we pray for.

One time the Lord said to me: "You keep on praying and I will keep on answering."

I am not advocating a passive attitude toward the Lord. He said we have not because we ask not.

It is one thing to pray fervently; but another matter to "put feet on our prayers." A prayer with feet is like an eagle with boots on. Prayers and eagles have wings. They do not plod along on the ground, they fly.

The very expression "put feet on your prayers" reveals the attitude of attempting to help God out.

"God helps those who help themselves." "Pray like everything depends on God and then act like everything depends on you." Both of these expressions reveal the current unscriptural attitude.

The Lord told us to "blow the trumpet" when we go to war, and He would remember us. This means to keep praying so God is aware of what we are doing and so we will look to God for our help.

Christ advised us to pray to the Lord of the harvest that He would send forth laborers. We don't always do this. We believe the Lord meant we should go; but this is not what He said. He told us to pray, not to go. He told us He would make us fishers of men, not to just go out and fish however and wherever we desired.

I was taught in Bible school that Jesus spoke in parables so people would remember what He said. The Bible says Jesus spoke in parables so people would not understand and be healed. Just the opposite from what I had been taught. This is because God brings certain people to Jesus. It is not a democratic free-for-all!

I believe the attitudes I have mentioned above have a common denominator: God does not know or care about what He is doing. We have to help Him out by going forth blindly and trying to get people to adhere to our religious beliefs.

Now, either this attitude is correct or else it is not correct. I absolutely refuse to hover in the middle. Either Christ is going to build His own Church, or He wants me to build it according to my own understanding and in my own strength. Either I am to go forth blindly doing what I think is best, or the Lord Jesus will show me my part and help me to do it.

The latest twist on the desire to help God out is business management techniques applied to building churches. Establish your goals (more churches; more people saved). Establish your techniques for attaining these goals. Develop your quality-control techniques. Practice system iteration to insure maximum efficiency and productivity.

You don't have to pray or hear from God. Just follow approved management techniques. Of course, after you have decided on your course of action you should pray that God will bless it.

I am in favor of being logical and clear in what we do. However, the Bible does command us to not lean on our own understanding but to commit our way to the Lord.

In any case, the effectiveness of any system, be it business, military, or education, is to establish clearly and definitely the desired goal. If the desired goal is not established beyond doubt, the operation of the system is an exercise in futility.

Now, to establish the building of churches and increasing the membership is a humanly conceived goal, it is not a Bible goal. Therefore we have error heaped on error, in that we are pursuing an unscriptural goal with unscriptural methods.

The biblical goal is twofold. First, it is that we be changed into the image of Christ. Second, that we be brought into untroubled rest in the Center of God's Person and will. The many Kingdom roles and responsibilities, such as being a part of the eternal Temple of God; being a brother of Jesus Christ; being a member of the Bride of the Lamb; being a part of the Body of Christ; are all utterly dependent on our being in the moral image of Jesus Christ and dwelling in untroubled rest in the Center of God's Person and will.

One might argue that before people can begin the transformation into Christ's image and the entrance into God's will, they first must be brought to Christ. There is no question that this is true. But bringing people to Christ is a means to the twofold primary goal. It is not the primary goal. If we make it the primary goal we have confusion.

After people have been brought to Christ they must become cross-carrying disciples who are prepared to deny themselves and follow the Lord each day. This is what the Great Commission states as its objective. If people accept Christ and then do not become cross-carrying disciples, the system has been aborted.

Now, when we set the building of churches and the adding of believers to those churches as the primary goal, we miss the point of the system. The goal is to form people into the image of Christ and bring them into the rest of God. Building churches and filling them with believers is one of the objectives that form the means to the twofold goal. Changing people into the image of Christ and bringing them into the rest of God is not a means to building churches and adding believers. The reverse is true.

Today the often expressed goal is to build churches and add members. But this is not the true biblical goal of the system. Consequently the Church as a whole is not moving forward in the plan of redemption. It is building churches and adding members, but it is not doing the what the Spirit desires. The Kingdom of God cannot be built in this manner.

The great illustration of the folly of trying to help God out is, of course, the story of Uzzah. No one, absolutely no one, could fault the good intentions of Uzzah. He was attempting to prevent the holy Ark of the Covenant from toppling over into the mud.

Why did not God notice that what Uzzah was doing was necessary and worthy of commendation? Why did God strike Uzzah dead on the spot?

When we can answer that question, we can understand how Christian leaders can labor year after year and produce churches filled with self-seeking believers who are practicing all the works of the sinful nature.

God killed Uzzah because Uzzah behaved ignorantly and presumptuously.

Sometimes I get a sense that the Lord Jesus is displeased because we plunge forward without waiting to hear what He wants. We may have the best intentions in the world, but we are forging ahead ignorantly and presumptuously.

You would think the Lord would get in the middle of our programs and yell "Stop!"

But He doesn't. There is something about the Nature of Christ that prevents His seeking to override our actions. Rather He chooses to wait. And then He whispers to those who are patiently seeking His will.

The Lord Jesus always works in love, joy, and peace. He delights Himself with those who, with childlike trust place their hand in His and walk with Him. These He uses to work the works that have eternal significance.

Meanwhile Babylon cries, "Work! work! work!" Yet she will not lift the load with one of her fingers. I guess religious leaders have always been like this.

I realize there are godly leaders. I realize also that there are many Christians around the world who are laboring in the finest traditions of Christendom.

I realize also that there is truth in what I am saying.

Our world is in a mess (2003). I don't believe anyone would argue about this. I marvel at our president, George Bush, how he manages to cope with the myriad responsibilities of his office. So many problems seem incapable of solution.

For example, I don't see how it will be possible for the Israelis and the Palestinians to agree on the status of Jerusalem.

If there ever was a moment in history when people need to hear what the Lord Jesus is saying, it is now. There simply are no political, educational, or financial solutions that are going to bring harmony among nations. Only God can do this.

But we must believe God has a plan. That God knows what He is doing. That God has not turned the world over to Satan or to mankind. That God has the power to do as He likes with every creature in the universe. God is in control!

Why does God permit suffering? God does not cause suffering. It is sin that brings about suffering.

Then why does God not intervene and prevent people from sinning? Because God wants people who obey Him because they desire to, not because they are compelled to be righteous against their will.

Does God realize the agony of the African people as they experience drought, famine, and AIDS? Does God know about the African children who are being born with AIDS?

God knows about every child and feels the suffering.

Why doesn't God heal all the sick and feed all the hungry?

Because when people are healthy and have no problems they do not serve the Lord.

Does God afflict people so they will pray? God afflicted the Apostle Paul! I think it was King David who said, "Before I was afflicted I went astray." Have you personally had that experience?

God at Babel created various languages so people could not understand one another and work together. This Divine action produced wars. That should teach us that we ought not to assume what God wants. We need to hear what God is saying at any given time. The Temple was filled with the leaders of Israel, but only Anna and Simeon recognized God in the Baby Jesus. How blind we can be and never realize it!

Because the living God behaves in unfathomable ways--ways that are not approved of or understood by the educated people of our time--we should not be rushing around trying to build the Kingdom of God

when we do not know what we are doing.

We say to people, "Jesus loves you," when the truth may be that the Lord is disgusted with the individual.

Paradise was on earth once. How did the people behave?

Jesus Christ was on the earth once, healing the sick and bringing blessing everywhere He went. How was He treated?

Every person who has lived on the earth and then died is somewhere in the spirit world, waiting for the Day of Resurrection. When that day arrives, every person will be judged fairly.

God died on the cross for the sins of men. So who is able to accuse God of unrighteousness?

Christ said He would build His Church. He knows what He is doing. He has seen the blueprint, we haven't. I think Jesus is looking for people who will pray every day, read their Bible, worship together with other believers, give of their means, and serve as they are able. Who will, in addition to these good works, listen carefully for the voice of Jesus at every moment of every day and night. And when they hear that voice, do precisely what Jesus commands.

"Whatever He says to you, do it!"

Meanwhile the religious babylons will cry "Work! work! work!" But they will be eating in fine restaurants while you are endeavoring to obey them by fasting and passing out tracts.

If we want, we can dance on the mountains of spices with the Lord. I would rather do this than "burn out for Christ" while I was trying to help God out.

Wouldn't you?

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