

PM Acts 17:16-34 Paul in Athens

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Date: 24 August 2025

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[0 : 00] The NIV is doing good to all. And you can tell that there's a certain theme in this particular chapter. To bear one's burdens and to do good to all.

which is kind of what we were reading earlier. We can see that the apostle Paul covers both doing good to all and bearing one another's burdens.

But there is a tension there. There is a tension that you can read when you read. You can detect a tension between doing good and being good.

A tension between doing good and being good. A tension between Christian service to others and also being a godly Christian.

And I use the word tension hesitatingly because it might seem almost like you might think it's a contradiction, but it's not.

[1 : 02] It's not. We have to bear one another's burdens. Yes, that's true. In chapter 6 we read the verse 1, Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him the spirit of gentleness.

But then we read the next line, Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. So you want to bear one another's burdens, yes, but at the same time make sure that you watch yourself too.

You do not want to be selfish, you want to be selfless, but also at the same time you need to watch yourself. We can't bear one another's burdens and forget to maintain our good Christian character and our good Christian testimony.

When we do any good for others, we must do so with a pure heart and the right attitude. And this is particularly so with the Christian ministry, which is all about sharing God's word, sharing the knowledge of God, sharing the knowledge of Christ with people within the church and people outside these four walls.

You can see a little hint of this in verse 6, that the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. So if we have learned something from other Christians in our midst, well, we share it with others as well and vice versa.

[2 : 27] The Christian faith is not something that you keep within yourselves, but it's something that we share with the people around us, whether it be people within the congregation or people outside the congregation.

And this is a case not just for the pastor or the minister or for the office bearers. This passage doesn't limit it to just office bearers and so on.

It's for all Christians, all who love the Lord, who have interest in the things of God, who desire to know something about Christ, about the doctrines of the faith, the teachings of the sacred scripture.

Anyone with interest in that, we ought to share with one another what we've learned and what we've experienced and what we've understood from the word of God.

So when we share in this congregation, if you share in a Christian ministry, it's not just limited to the pulpit ministry, but includes things in outreach events.

[3 : 42] So like I said already, this morning you can see there's an open air ministry. There's also the open air ministry. That would be a good place to be part of and to be encouraged and to be an encouragement to those who will be involved in this particular ministry.

And there may be others. I notice you have a drop-in as well. I'm assuming that's the coffee mornings. These are also activities within the church that we can all be part of and encourage one another in these areas.

But when we do so, as I said, and as the Apostle Paul is telling us, we must still maintain our good Christian character and good Christian testimony.

So yes, we share. We share with each other's burdens. We support. We participate. But we still need to maintain a good Christian character. Which is why I said at the beginning, it sounds like there's a bit of a tension there.

Because not everybody understands this. And it's quite evident that in the time of the Apostle, there are those who probably neglect one area over the other.

[5 : 01] So some may be engaged in Christian service, but they neglect cultivating good Christian character. And perhaps you may know some people who have done that.

They're very much engaged in Christian service, but they neglect some of the Christian behavior and Christian testimony. And there are others who only build up in their own Christian walk and neglect to do anything in terms of Christian service.

Now, both scenarios are not ideal. Both scenarios are not ideal. And there seems to be a little bit of a hint there in verse 7 and 8.

Do not be deceived. God is not mocked. For whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, and so on.

There seems a bit of a hint or a bit of a suggestion that there's something going on even in the time of the Apostle Paul and the church in Galatia, that perhaps there may be those who have a habit of excusing themselves from the rigors of the Christian faith, whether it be in Christian service and they focus on themselves, or they focus on Christian service and they neglect themselves, their own Christian character, and so on.

[6 : 20] So there's a bit of an imbalance then, and there's also that same imbalance today in this day and age that we live in. But when we come to verse 9, it continues.

There's a continuation from verse 7 and 8. Verse 9 we read, Let us not grow weary in doing good, for a new season we will reap if we do not give up.

It's a continuation from verse 7 and 8. Because you see in verse 7 we read about sowing. God is not mocked for whatever one sows that he will also reap. There's a sowing and there's a reaping.

In verse 9, there's a growing. You notice this? There's a sowing, there's a reaping, and then there's a growing. This idea of growing, let us not grow weary of doing good.

This same idea appears elsewhere. It's not the only occasion, but in 2 Thessalonians, you don't need to turn there, but in 2 Thessalonians 3, verse 13, we read, As for you brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.

[7 : 32] It appears as well in 2 Thessalonians, but as for you brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. In the case of 2 Thessalonians 3, verse 13, the context of that is about laziness.

It's about laziness. For we read in verse 11 and 12, before the two verses, before verse 13, we read, For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busy bodies.

Now such persons, we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ, to do their work quietly, and earn their own living. As for you brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.

You see what I mean? There's a, there's a, the context in that particular passage in 2 Thessalonians 3, verse 13, is about laziness. What we have in verse 9, here in Galatians, is slightly different.

Paul is trying to encourage believers, in chapter 6, verse 9, into doing good. Into doing good.

[8 : 45] Now, perhaps you may ask, what did he mean by doing good? What is this, what does this involve? What does this include? Depends on which commentator you read.

Haldane wrote that this is about the path of duty. The path of duty. That's what doing good is all about. Martin Luther speaks about all good works.

All good works. However, the original, Greek, apparently, is a lot broader than that. This, this thing about doing good is a lot broader than just doing good works.

but, the word is beautiful. The word, the original word, means beautiful. It suggests something more comprehensive, something broader.

It's not just good works. It will include good works, but it's more than that. Elsewhere, we know that the Apostle Paul already speaks about doing good works way back in chapter 2.

[9 : 59] when we read in chapter 2, verse 10, only they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do. Yeah, so there's already some element of good works there that is, that would be, that would be included in this doing good or beautiful.

It's not uncommon that when the Apostle Paul writes in his epistle, he will use phrases which are a lot broader, a lot more comprehensive.

So, for example, you read about walking the Spirit. Yeah, chapter 5, verse 16, there's walking the Spirit. But I say, chapter 5, verse 16, but I say, walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

You can ask, what is this walk by or walk in the Spirit? What does this include? But in verse 9, what do we have before us, we're talking about doing good.

Yes, it includes doing good for others, giving to the poor, helping the poor, food, clothing, shelter. Yes, that's the physical side of things.

[11 : 17] They need food, they need clothing, they need shelter. But also, there's also the spiritual side of things. Spiritual instructions, telling people about the Word of God, encouraging people.

I've said already this morning that, you know, we live in a day and age of much discontentment, much sorrows and sadness and discouragements.

Well, what can we do about this? Well, we can give people the instructions, the encouragement, the spiritual encouragement, and the spiritual advice on how they can find true happiness in and through the person of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

That's what we should be doing. And so, we read even in verse 2, bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. Christ. So, I hope you can see that this doing good is more than just good works in terms of giving to the poor.

We give to anybody what they need, physical needs, but also spiritual needs. that's why in verse 9, there's a real exhortation for us to persevere in the Christian faith, in the Christian life.

[12 : 39] That ought to have been my first point, I forgot to mention, it's an exhortation to persevere in the Christian life. It is an exhortation there. Let us not grow weary of doing good.

It is an exhortation. The Apostle Paul realized that Christians will feel weary trying to live the Christian life.

It is a battle. It is a battle between cultivating godliness, cultivating holiness, fighting against our indwelling sin, and all our failings and weakness.

All that is part of our fallen human nature is still there. even when we become Christians, we still have all our fallenness within us.

Even in chapter 5, when Paul was rebuking the Galatians, he wrote, you were running well, who hindered you from obeying the truth?

[13 : 46] See, even as far back as chapter 5, he is already telling them, you've been doing well. The church has been set up, you've heard about Christ, Christ has been, earlier on in Galatians, in the letter to Galatians, Christ has been, as it were, painted, almost like painted before you, portrayed before you, and now you're turning back to all the Mosaic law and following the Judaizers, you've started well, what has stopped you in the right journey, in the right path?

Why have you swerved from that? So it is, it is part of our fallen human nature that we do fail in all these things.

And so there's an exhortation there, that's why this verse is there, to encourage us not to grow weary of doing good. It is, there's a need for continued effort and constant toil.

Let's don't kid ourselves. It is a constant toil and continued effort is required. We are very fond of ease. Let's be honest with ourselves.

We would much prefer a life of ease, or as Haldin puts it, the natural attachment to the world. A natural attachment to the world, that's what we are like, even as Christians, and perhaps we lack the staying power.

[15 : 23] We lack the staying power, we are perhaps easily discouraged. It's no wonder that Christians need encouragement, need encouragement in patience, in perseverance, in our service, in our Christian walk with the Lord, in order just for us to have a faithful Christian life.

is that not true? We need that. We need that encouragement, and that's what the Apostle Paul is doing here in this verse, the first half of verse 9.

But he's not going to just tell us, or he's not just going to exhort us to continue in our Christian life and service, but he's going to give us some reasons for that.

the Apostle Paul is going to give us some reasons for why we are exhorted to persevere in our Christian life and service.

And that is in verse, again verse 9, second half. Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap if we do not give up. We will reap if we do not give up.

[16 : 33] Now, because there are those who lack the staying power, and those who are perhaps more easily discouraged, Paul is going to give them some reasons why we should persevere, why we should not grow weary in doing good.

Perhaps there may be those in the time of the Galatian church, there may be those who are perhaps struggling and wondering I'm not seeing any results.

I've been trying to serve the Lord, I'm trying to grow as a Christian and trying to serve the people of God and serve the church. I'm struggling in both ways and I don't see any results.

I don't see any results, I don't see anything tangible. Never mind perhaps there's a lack of support from several quarters within the church, but the fact is I don't see any real tangible results.

Perhaps there may be those at the time who are asking is there going to be any rewards coming my way? What if there's no rewards coming my way at all?

[17 : 49] Or perhaps they may be asking when will we be rewarded for our labors for the Lord? Perhaps some may be asking that question. Now we may say oh you shouldn't be thinking about rewards and so on but at the same time we still would like to see something from our labors.

If we grow fruits and crops we want to see the crops, we want to see the fruits, we want to see our crops grow and do well. We want to see results from that.

We have children, we want to see our children do well in life. we have a farm, we have cattle, we want to see how the animals do well.

It's not wrong to seek after some kind of rewards or some kind of results. Well, the Apostle Paul is actually going to give them an answer for those questions.

He's going to remind them that they will reap in due season. In due season. Now, it depends on who you read.

[19 : 03] Some have said that in due season could mean on the day of judgment. You know, on the day of judgment everything is all laid bare and everything is all the efforts of the Lord's people are going to be shown forth and everything will be made clear to everybody the results of their labors.

on the final day of judgment when this old order is passed. Well, I think there's a bit more than that.

I don't think that in due season refers to just at the end of time, at the end of the day of judgment, but it refers to the proper time in God's time.

I think that's what the Apostle Paul is saying here. For in due season, it's about God's timing. Not our timing, but it's God's timing. Something similar appears in 1 Timothy 6, 14, where we read, concerning the coming of the Lord, to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, to which he would display at the proper time.

He would display at the proper time. time. And the Apostle Paul, in due season, is saying the same thing, that you will receive, you will see, you reap something, you reap in due season, at the proper time, in God's time.

[20 : 38] Not our time, not our own time. We would love it if it was our own time, but no, it's about the Lord's time. And that would make it a lot sweeter for the readers in those times.

Because, let's think about it this way, if the reaping was going to come down to us and our own timing, you know what we're going to say?

Well, I did this, I see the results, it's all down to me. It's because of me that I deserve this blessing. Yeah, if the reaping was down to us and our own timing, and when it happens, we will be perhaps rather swell-headed and think that it's all down to us.

Then that makes reaping not one of grace, but one of merit. And the Lord is not going to have that. And so it says here, in due season, we will reap the Lord's timing, not our timing.

That will make it a lot sweeter when it happens, when we know what we have reaped due to the Lord, we can say it's all glory to the Lord and to Him alone.

[21 : 52] And we receive His grace and His mercy in revealing these things to us. But then the next question you can be asked is, reap what?

Reap what? For in due season, we will reap. Well, that's a bit of a blank space there. What do you mean by reap? well, is it reaping the full rewards of all the good that we have done to the people around us?

What is this reward? What is this reaping? Is it a reward of some sorts? Or is it the harvest of souls? Is this reward, is this reaping a harvest of souls?

For in due season, we will reap. Are we going to reap a harvest of souls? Are we going to see the good that we do to others, that we seek to do to others, when we bear other people's burdens, and we seek to be an encouragement to others, we give them not just their material needs, but we give them their spiritual needs, and we see from there, we see lives changed, we see perhaps conversions, we see people come to faith in Christ because of that, a harvest of souls, perhaps we go into the open air, we minister in the open air, we find time after time and time again, people come in to our churches, perhaps people take the literature, and then they come and slowly we realize there are people who are coming to faith in Christ.

Is it going to be a reward? Smiling faces, people in knowledge our existence and thank us for the things that we've done, or is it going to be a harvest of souls?

[23 : 48] Well, I don't know. That's the bottom line is I don't know. It could be both. It could be both. And if we know anything about the New Testament, the way the Apostle Paul puts it, he's written elsewhere in 1 Corinthians chapter 3 verse 6, where he writes, I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.

Now, it's evident in that particular verse, he may not know, but he knows, for one thing, he's done his bit, he knows somebody else is going to do the next bit, at the end of the day, God is going to give the increase and he's going to get all the glory and praise.

So, perhaps that may be a bit for us, a little snapshot of what this reaping is all about. But the interesting thing about this part of this verse is the way the Apostle Paul answered, let us not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we will reap if we do not give up.

If we do not give up. Or in the authorized version, we shall reap if we faint not. Now, I know fainting sounds a bit strange, strange, it's just old English.

It's about being relaxed, not relaxed in terms of inactivity, but it's about being weakened through exhaustion. Which is probably why the ESV writes, if we do not give up.

[25 : 23] Weakened through exhaustion. So, you can read this verse and you can read something like, we shall reap if we do not give over exhausted and disheartened.

we shall reap if we do not give over, exhausted and disheartened. And I know what some might say.

Some would probably say, well, your God, the God of the Bible is so hard. You reap a reward and harvest if we do not give up despite being tired or discouraged.

discouraged. And it is a big topic. When you think about it this way, it is a very big topic. Is that so?

Is the Lord so hard that we will reap a reward and harvest if we do not give up despite being tired and discouraged along the way? Well, first of all, we're able to put that whole idea that God is a hard task master.

[26 : 24] God gives his grace and his strength by his spirit, through his word, that we will be encouraged and we will grow and persevere.

But we do not give up despite, and we should not give up despite our tiredness and our discouragements. One writer puts it this way, there is no reward if somebody, if one, becomes disheartened and gives over his efforts.

And you think about it, well, that's true. If we become disheartened and we give up the ministry that the Lord has given us, well, we would not have any rewards. If you don't do the work, if you don't do the task, you will not see the rewards.

So, there is some truth in that. It is true. There is no reward if one is appalled by obstacles, that gives up on account of the embarrassment thrown in his way.

Now, is that right? Well, if you think about it, in one sense, it is. When there's obstacles in the way, when we are embarrassed or disheartened by the scorn that people hurl in our way because we are Christians, if we slink away from that, if we shrink into our shells, how are we going to see any fruit bore from that?

[28 : 02] How are we going to see any, reap anything, if we just shrink into our little shells? so in one sense, yes, there is no reward if we face obstacles and we give up on the account of embarrassment thrown in our way.

There is no reward if one longs for ease and withdraws from an area of service. It shows that he has no true attachment to the cause of Christ.

Christ. Well, if you think about that, that is true as well. How are we going to see any fruit born?

How are we going to see any, reap any rewards? How can we see any reaping of the harvest of souls if we decided, nope, I want to have a life of ease and I turn away from an area of service?

It shows that we have no true attachment to the cause of Christ. It doesn't mean that we're not Christians, but it shows that we have no attachment for the cause of Christ.

[29 : 13] Being a Christian is one thing, but being a Christian means there is a job to be done, there is a task, there is a fight to be fought, there are souls to be won.

If we choose to shrink away, then, well, we wouldn't see any rewards. well, how then do we manage this situation then?

How do we cope with this? We know the Apostle Paul is speaking to us in this verse as an exhortation to persevere in the Christian life, and then there is the, he gives us reasons as to why we should persevere in this Christian life, but then how do we manage this situation, what we are in, where we are, while we do not give up, in due season we reap, if we don't give up, how do we continue in this journey then?

Well, I suggest just two things, prayer and persistence, prayer and persistence. God works through our prayers, and when we pray, this requires much waiting and persistence.

I think you know exactly what this is all about, prayer and persistence. We have to endure in our prayer, with prayer we have to endure with prayer and we are trusting, we pray and we trust in God's timing and we grow stronger and mature in Christ when we pray.

[31 : 16] And persistence or perseverance help us to continue in doing good. Even when the results are not immediately apparent to us, we continue in doing this.

the apostle James writes, Be patient therefore brethren unto the coming of the Lord.

Behold, husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth and hath long patience for it. And that's what we should be doing as well.

the apostle James speaks about keeping crops, fruits and so on and that farmer has to wait, has patience.

You can't rush it. And likewise with us in the Christian walk, whether it be in service or whether in growing grace and in knowledge of our saviour, there must be prayer and there must be persistence.

[32 : 22] You know, some sins in our life may take time to be mortified, some Christian graces might take time to be cultivated, some ministries that we are involved in may take some time for us to see any fruit, but we continue to do it.

We continue to do it. Elsewhere, the apostle Peter reminds us to be sober and watch unto prayer. And again, James and Peter, just like Paul, say these things because we are prone to give up.

We are prone to shrink into our little shells and to turn away when we face difficulties. But the Lord has given us that promise.

In due season, we will reap. It's not we might reap, but we will reap. If we do not give up. And I believe that this reaping is in God's timing.

Not in, not at the end of time, but in God's time. So it can be any time. It could be tomorrow. It could be next week. It could be next year. It could be ten years time.

[33 : 41] We just do not know. But this promise is there so that we continue, we persevere, knowing that when we pray and we persevere, the Lord will answer our prayers because this verse tells us so.

Perhaps if you're here this evening, you're not a believer in Christ, well, this verse also reminds us that, and I'm quoting from Albert Barnes, he who becomes a true Christian becomes such for eternity.

He has enlisted never to withdraw. He becomes pledged to do good and to serve God always. No obstacles are to deter, no embarrassments are to drive him away from the field.

With the vigor of his youth, the wisdom and influence of his riper years, with his remaining powers, when enfeebled by age, with the last pulsation of life here, and with his immortal energies in a higher world, he is to do good.

For that, he is to live. In that, he is to die. And when he awakes in the resurrection with renovated powers, he is to awake to an everlasting service of doing good, as far as he may have opportunity in the kingdom of God.

[35 : 19] And, you know, if you're here and you're thinking about being a Christian or thinking about what the Christian faith is about, this is it. When you become a Christian, you have signed up to be in the Lord's army, to be engaged in the Lord's service, and not just in the certain time in your life, but all through your life, until the day the Lord calls you and I home.

So, I hope this will be of some encouragement to us. Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season, we will reap, we will reap, if we do not give up.

May the Lord help us not to give up in our Christian walk, in our Christian service, but to continue in doing so, till the day we shall see the Lord face to face.

We'll conclude in singing. We'll conclude in singing.