

The Sin of Omission

by Billy Graham

The Bible teaches that possibly the greatest sins that can be committed are those of omission. This message deals with the sin of omission or the sin of negative living. Nothing could please Satan more than for Christians to fall into the rut of negation. Hundreds of Christians are continually talking about the things they do not do.

Some Christians say, "I do not dance, I do not drink, I do not gamble." And they think that because they do not do these particular things that they have a special type of righteousness. They become almost like the Pharisees of old.

The world is not half so impressed by the things that one does not do as they are by the good things that one does. Certainly, one should not do things that are wrong; but there are thousands of people who glory in what they do not do, while they commit more grievous sins by not doing good things. They are guilty of the sin of omission or of negative living.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the greatest London preacher, was once the guest of a man who made his virtues the chief topic of conversation; but his virtues were all of the negative kind, consisting of the bad things he had not done. Disgusted with the man's self-righteousness, Spurgeon said, "Why man, you are just a bundle of negatives. You don't drink, you don't gamble, you don't swear. What in the name of goodness do you do?"

We know that, fundamentally, salvation is not of works. But in stressing this phase of the gospel, too many have neglected to emphasize the fact that we will be judged more according to the good we have left undone than for the evil we have done. Good works are not a means of salvation because we are saved by grace through faith. We are saved only on the grounds of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But, our good works are an evidence of salvation; and if we fail to do all the good we can, to all the people we can, at any time we can, by any means we can, will we be condemned at

the judgement bar of God. Make no mistake about that.

GOOD WORKS AS UNTO GOD

Jesus gave a clear, strong warning against the blighting, murderous sin of omission. "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was ahungered and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.' Then shall they also answer him, saying, 'Lord, when saw we thee ahungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?' Then shall he answer them, saying, 'Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal'" (Matthew 25:41-46).

He called those who failed to do good as unto Him, "Cursed." He called those who did good as unto Him, "Righteous."

It is very significant that in every one of Jesus' parables of condemnation the sin condemned is the sin of omission.

For example, the guest at the wedding supper was cast out because he did not wear the wedding garment. The five foolish virgins did not bring oil with their lamps. The man with one talent did not trade with it to his master's profit. The rich man did not minister to the poor man, Lazarus, lying at his gate. The unmerciful servant did not forgive his fellow-servant who owed him a paltry hundred pence. In the parable of the last judgement, those on the left hand were cast into outer darkness not because they had committed some grave evil, but because they failed to do good when the opportunity presented itself.

A true sacrament is not a mere creed, or ordinance, of form, but it is a life of service to God and to man. The most eloquent prayer is the prayer through hands that heal and bless. The highest form of worship is the worship of unselfish Christian service. The greatest form of

praise is the sound of consecrated feet seeking out the lost and helpless.

In the parable of the last judgment the people were not asked questions of theology. As important as doctrine is, they were not asked about their doctrinal beliefs. Neither were they asked what sins they had committed. Theirs was the neglect to do good, and their sin was grave enough to send them into everlasting punishment. There must be a practical outworking of our faith here in this present world, or it will never endure in the world to come. We need fewer words and more charitable works; less palaver and more pity; less repetition of creed and more compassion.

The Pharisees majored on show but minored on service, and Jesus said, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20).

CHRIST'S HANDS

During the war, a church in Strasburg, Germany, was totally destroyed; but a statue of Christ which stood by the altar was almost unharmed. Only the hands of the statue were missing. When the church was rebuilt, a famous sculptor offered to make new hands; but, after considering the matter, the members decided to let it stand as it was - without hands. "For," they said, "Christ has no hands but our hands to do His work on earth. If we don't feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, entertain the stranger, visit the imprisoned and clothe the naked, who will?"

Christ is depending on us to do the very things which He did while upon earth. But many of us have failed Him. We have gone our own selfish, careless way, heedless of the cry of the needy.

My friends, if the gospel we preach does not have a social application, if it will not work effectively in the work-a-day world, then it is not the gospel of Jesus Christ.

For example, suppose there is a man in your community who has done you an injustice.

Feelings have mounted between you and everyone knows the way you feel about him. You could extend to him the warm hand of forgiveness but wilfully you refuse to do so. That is your sin.

Jesus laid down a very clear rule for such a situation. He said, "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go, thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matthew 5:23-24).

Christ our Lord set this example of forgiveness before us. He was maligned, blasphemed, falsely accused and crucified. Amidst unthinkable suffering He said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:24). He who had the grace to forgive can give you the grace to forgive your enemies. Remember that.

LOOK AROUND YOU

Perhaps you know a man who has misfortune and bereavement. His burden has been almost too great to bear. You have thought that you should visit him and offer him a helping hand and some financial help, but you have neglected to do it. That is your sin. Christ has been holding out His hand of compassion, saying, "As you do it for the least of these, you do it for me" (Matthew 25:45). But you have turned a deaf ear to it. You have gone on your selfish way, one step nearer judgment.

Maybe you know a young man with the red blood of youth coursing through his veins. You have known the battle he is fighting against temptation. He is discouraged and beginning to lose heart. It would be so easy for you to lay your hand on his shoulder and give him a word of encouragement and cheer, but have not done it. That is your sin.

Perhaps you know a mother who for days has been standing over the fevered body of a sick child. Night and day she has kept her weary vigil, and now she is utterly worn out and her nerves are taut. It occurred to you to visit her and relieve her for one night, but you did not do it. You went

on your own selfish way. That is your sin.

Or maybe you know a poor family down the street. You have heard that the father is out of work and that they have scarcely a thing to eat. You have intended to visit that family and offer your help, but you have procrastinated and failed to do it. That is your sin.

According to civil law, it is not a sin; but in the eyes of God, it is as grave as any evil. "These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone," said Jesus (Matthew 23:23). A serious judgment awaits those who fail to do these acts of Christian kindness.

Do you know a man in your neighborhood who needs Christ? Have you done anything to bring him to the Savior? Do you know others who are unable to go to Sunday school and church because they have no way? Have you offered to help them?

IMPORTANT MATTERS

God gave His only Son to help the condition of mankind. What have you done? Will the Judge of the universe furrow His brow and condemn you as He did the Pharisees when He said, "Woe unto you ... for ye ... have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith" (Matthew 23:23).

Must you commit some great sin to lose the worthwhile things of life? No! Many a home has been wrecked; not because the husband or wife committed any great sin, but simply because they neglected to do the good things which keep marriage and love alive. Many a business has failed; not because the owner was dishonest or had done great wrong, but because he just failed to perform the little kind gestures that bring in customers. His was the fatal mistake of omission.

Many a man has lost his health; not because he abused his body with immoral practices or injured it by filthy habits, but simply because he was indifferent toward his physical welfare. He neglected his health. His was the sin of omission, the evil of sheer neglect.

Many a person is shriveled in his soul. He has drawn the dark shades of selfishness around him and sits on the brink of spiritual death all because

he has passed every God-given opportunity to do good. Now, because those golden hours are past and he is craven in his soul, the light has gone out of his life. The dusk of eternity's night has already begun to settle down upon him.

Oh, yes, God also hears the cry of the starving millions in Asia. He hears the wail of the millions of untouchables in India. He sees the misery of the millions of underprivileged in Africa. Their cry has come up before Him. He can meet their needs through us. He has given you wealth. Have you divided it? He has given you love. Have you shared it? He has given you an abundance. Have you given some?

He knows the suffering of the sad, the distressed and the bereaved around the world. "And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these ... a cup of cold water only ... verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward" (Matthew 10:42).

THE REAL CHRISTIAN LIFE

Unless our belief in God helps us to help our fellow man, our faith stands condemned. Our love for God is best proved by our regard for the needs of our neighbors. Man is God's crowning creation. God regarded him highly enough to give His only Son for our redemption. We cannot be oblivious of our neighbor's needs and expect the continued favor of the Almighty.

The Bible says, "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).

The Christian life, if it is to be worthy of the name, is the life of selflessness. Self is crucified. Jesus, our Lord, said, "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8:34).

"Lord help me to live from day to day
In such a self-forgetful way
That even when I kneel to pray
My prayer shall be for other."