

Results Don't Matter

A Sermon by Rev. Joel Christian Glenn

10 August, 2025

Children's Talk: Doing the Right Thing

How do you know what's the right thing to do? Maybe it's whatever feels good. But doesn't it feel good when you take something that you really want, like a sweet from the jar? Maybe it's whatever you can get away with. But if you get away with breaking a rule, and no one finds out ever, wasn't it still wrong to break the rule? Maybe it's when you do exactly what someone else tells you. But can't people lie or trick you into doing the wrong thing? It's hard sometimes to know what the right thing to do is.

But something we can always try to do is to listen to the Lord. The way we know we are doing the right thing is first by listening to the Lord, and then doing what He says. The Lord told a story that compares listening to Him to building a house:

Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came,

and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall. (Matthew 7:24-27)

If we listen to the Lord it's like building a house. But for that house to be strong it has to be built on a rock; that is like listening to the Lord, and then doing the things that He says. That last part is very important. You could come to church and listen to many things that the Lord says! But then only do the things that feel good; or only do the right things when you know you can't get away with doing the wrong ones; or doing what other people tell you to do, even when you suspect they might not be right. The reason the Lord tells us what the right things to do are is so that we can actually do them. It's not much help if we just listen and don't do them.

Now this is easy with some things: what does the Lord say about stealing a sweet from the candy jar? He says don't steal! So we need to listen and not do that. But what does the Lord say about telling on your friend who stole a sweet? On the one hand, he says to try to stop people from doing bad things; on the other hand He tells us to not take revenge or try to get back at people. So when you tell on your friend, are you trying to be

helpful? Or are you just trying to get them in trouble because they got you in trouble last time you stole? It's tricky! We can have listened very well to the Lord, so we know we need to not steal and also not take revenge. But actually doing what He wants can be hard when it feels like we have to pick.

So what should you do when you really don't know what the Lord says about something? What can you do when you know what the Lord says, but don't know how to do it? How could you try to practice and get better at doing what the Lord says? These are important questions that all of us, even all the adults, need to keep working on for our whole lives. Because that is the only way that we will not only be able to hear the Lord's words, but also do them.

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How do you know when you've done the right thing? One way is to look at the outcome or the results. Did things turn out ok? If so, you may have done things right! But there's a problem with this way of thinking. Sometimes we make bad choices, and things turn out fine anyway. And other times we make the right choices and things go pretty poorly. What got me thinking of this topic was being on a hike and wanting to take a shortcut over the top of a waterfall, rather than turning back and having to retrace my steps. I was right close to the top, but to get to the very top would have required pulling myself over a high, wet, rock ledge. It wasn't clear I would be able to make it. In the end I decided the risk of falling back and cracking my skull was too high and I turned back. But I kept thinking, "What if I had tried and it had worked? Maybe it was the right idea!" And then it hit me that even if it had worked, and I had safely climbed up, it would still have been a very bad idea! Even if it had worked out that wouldn't mean it was smart.

Let's say there was a one in three chance I would have gravely injured myself; even if it didn't happen, that's an incredibly stupid chance to take! Now that's just a very external example. But what about in spiritual things? In the realm of right and wrong, good and evil? We sometimes do the exact same thing and judge the morality of a choice by the outcome rather than by the rightness of the action itself.

There's an interesting interaction between Jesus and one of His disciples that illustrates this kind of situation. Jesus was preparing the disciples for His own impending death, and Peter did not like that particular outcome:

And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He spoke this word openly. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." (Mark 8:31-33)

Peter rebuked the Lord, assuring Him that He would not, or perhaps should not, have to endure such suffering. The text does not say exactly why, but it is implied that Peter thought the

Lord could avoid that bad outcome. He was in essence looking at the bad outcome that would come of the work that Jesus was doing and saying that it wasn't worth it. Jesus then rebuked Him for being mindful only of the things of men, not of God. In other words, Jesus knew that even if His work resulted in His own death, it was still worth it: the worldly outcome would be death, but there was a higher, spiritual battle at stake. Judged based purely on the immediate outcome, Jesus was making a mistake. But He knew that the real assessment had to be based on something spiritual, not worldly, external results.

Let's run through some examples of this in our own lives. Say someone is grieving, and you make yourself say something to them, and it turns out to be the exact wrong thing, and therefore you decide that saying something at all was wrong. The truth is, the choice to say something was correct and loving, even though the outcome was not what you hoped for or intended. Or take someone who has opened up his heart and allowed himself to be vulnerable with a close friend only to be betrayed by him: from this experience he concludes that he

should never have opened up, and he won't make that mistake again! Because the result was so painful, the action must have been the wrong one. When things go bad, we conclude we've made bad choices.

On the other hand, you might tell your wife that you did take out the trash like she asked, even though you forgot. In a spare moment you do take out the trash before she notices, and she's none the wiser. Seemingly you've gotten away with it, so the lie was fine! But actually you've still done something wrong, even though it ended up working out. This is further compounded with the thought, I can't tell her the truth, she'll get mad at me! Actually, telling the truth is the right thing to do, regardless of how mad she gets. Or take a worker who comes to fix the old washing machine. He knows that you really need a new one, it will work much better for you in the long run, but you've asked him to just repair it, you don't want a new one. But he is not interested in doing the work, it will be so painful and not worth it. So instead of repairing like you asked, he just says that it needs to be replaced, can't be repaired, it's not an

option. He is lying. But he justifies it because it will mean you will get something good, and it just happens that he will get the installation fee and have to do less work. When things go well, we assume we've made good choices.

It's worth thinking about why we do this, why we are so quick to judge based on immediate results. There is a strong human tendency to think that anything that feels good is good, and that anything that we find intellectually satisfying is true, and conversely, to think that anything that feels bad is bad, and that anything that is intellectually unsatisfying is false. The Teachings of the New Church lay this concept out clearly:

Everyone calls good that which, owing to his will's love, he feels as delightful, and he calls truth that which, owing to the wisdom of his intellect, he perceives therefore as giving satisfaction....

Evil to him is what destroys his affection's delight, and falsity that which destroys his thought's consequent satisfaction. (*Divine Providence* §195)

We see this playing out in the ways people try to justify their bad behaviour. How many people justify losing their cool by saying, "I really needed to get that off my chest, I feel so much better now." A much more challenging but useful example to

mention is that of infidelity: how many people have justified cheating by saying, “how could something that feels so good be bad? How could a relationship that makes so much sense be wrong?” When it feels good and satisfying, our minds tell us it is good and right.

We can find further justification in the fact that good really can come from bad things happening: a genuinely good outcome can occur from a bad choice. But this has more to do with how the Lord turns everything, even evil, to some good use. The fact that the Lord can use evil to achieve some good in the world does not mean the initial evil was in fact good, or that it was a good thing that it happened. If that were the case then all choices would be good no matter what, because the Lord always brings something good out of evil! It will not work to judge our actions based purely on whether something good comes of them. We have to recognize evil as evil, regardless of how it feels or what it accomplishes.

This is easier said than done. Returning to the example from the Word: Having had His back and forth with Peter Jesus

then gave some instructions on just how difficult it can be to remain mindful of the things of God, that is, remaining true to the Lord's teachings, when it comes to decision making. He points out that it will take a great deal of sacrifice and even pain; but that in the long run there will be an outcome or result that makes it worth it:

When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:34-37)

Following the Lord means denying ourselves; at times, giving up on things that feel good or make sense from our limited viewpoint; for some people it has meant even literally giving up their life for the sake of their faith. People have lost everything through doing what was right. But the one thing they did not lose was their own soul. What would it profit a man to gain even the whole world but lose his soul? To lose your soul means to become evil, which happens a little bit every time we turn from the Lord and make choices that violate His teachings—no matter

how good they might feel—and nothing is worth that. Doing the wrong thing is always detrimental, because it leads to hell. To save one's soul however takes living virtuously, regardless of the consequences. From an eternal point of view, doing the right thing is always beneficial, because it always contributes to your eternal salvation, to life in heaven for eternity. This is not just something we ought to do in order to save ourselves. In the long run it is also what will be best for others too. Becoming a heavenly, angelic person, who can continue to practice charity to eternity, is perhaps the greatest act of selflessness that we can offer the world.