

A Scriptural Primer: GOOD WORKS

Good works are sometimes a controversial subject in the Church. There may be many reasons for this, but perhaps a central one is that nearly all false religions emphasize human efforts and works for “salvation” of one kind or another. Even people claiming to know Christ have emphasized “good” works as what makes us acceptable to God. Many church-goers today believe that it is the “good” they do that means they can go to Heaven. This is a gross misunderstanding of the Gospel, which clearly says our salvation is a gift that cannot be earned by works, no matter how good they are. As a result, some Christians can get uncomfortable when people are exhorting Believers to “good works,” focusing on this rather than faith in Christ.

While our salvation is not determined by our works, and our focus must be on faith, we have been re-created (born-again) in Jesus to perform the good works of God. We cannot ignore them! Scripture clearly teaches that there will be losses and rewards in the resurrection based on our works. Let’s look at what Scripture says about Good Works. (Translations in KJV, NASB, and ESV).

ALL THE WORKS OF GOD ARE GOOD

So much of Scripture is praise to God for the works He has done. All of these works are good works. *“O give thanks unto the LORD; call upon His name: make known His deeds among the people. Sing unto Him, sing psalms unto Him: talk ye of all His wondrous works. Glory ye in His holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the LORD”* (PSALM 105:1-3 KJV).

“Great are the works of the LORD; They are studied by all who delight in them” (Psalm 111:2).

Only God knows what is good, and He has made everything for His own glory: *“All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the LORD weigheth the spirits. Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established. The LORD hath made all things for Himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil”* (Proverbs 16:2-4).

GOD’S WORKS ARE GOOD AND SHOW HIS CHARACTER

“In the day of my trouble I shall call upon You, For You will answer me. There is no one like You among the gods, O Lord, Nor are there any works like Yours” (Psalm 86:7-8).

“For the word of the Lord is right; and all His works are done in truth” (Psalm 33:4).

“But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, That I may tell of all Your works” (Psalm 73:28).

“Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!” (Psalm 107:8).

HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT ARE GOD’S WORKS?

“Do not incline my heart to any evil thing, To practice deeds of wickedness With men who do iniquity; And do not let me eat of their delicacies” (Psalm 141:4 NASB).

There are works in this world that are not of God. They are works of the devil, works of the flesh. How do we tell them apart? Good works show God’s character, whereas works of the flesh do not: *“Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:19-23 ESV).*

Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil: *“Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8).*

“To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. They profess to know God, but they deny Him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work” (Titus 1:15-16).

“The sins of some men are quite evident, going before them to judgment; for others, their sins follow after. Likewise also, deeds that are good are quite evident, and those which are otherwise cannot be concealed” (1 Timothy 5:24-25).

GOOD WORKS BRING GLORY TO GOD

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:14-16).

“Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Peter 2:11-13).

“Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom” (James 3:13).

GOD HAS CREATED THE BELIEVER
TO DO HIS GOOD WORKS IN THE EARTH

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

“Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work’” (John 4:34 NASB).

“But He answered them, ‘My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working’” (John 5:17).

“We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work” (John 9:4).

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also” (John 14:12a).

WE ARE TO ENCOURAGE
ONE ANOTHER TO GOOD WORKS

More than just doing good works when it suits us, we are to DEVOTE ourselves to them that we not be unfruitful: *“And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful” (Titus 3:14 ESV).*

Fellowship in love is crucial to good works: *“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:23-25).*

We are not saved by our good works, but we are to be devoted to good works now that we are saved: *“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless” (Titus 3:4-9 ESV).*

You cannot have true belief in Jesus and receive the Holy Spirit and not produce fruit—you cannot have true faith and not have works: *“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it*

does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness'—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead" (James 2:14-26).

*"Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. **Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works**, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed" (1 Timothy 6:17-19).*

"Likewise urge the young men to be sensible; in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us" (Titus 2:6-8).

There are many good examples for us of Believers who performed good works: *"Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of **good works and acts of charity**" (Acts 9:36 ESV).*

WE ARE NOT SAVED BY OUR WORKS, BUT WE ARE CREATED TO DO THEM

*"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are **His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them**" (Ephesians 2:8-10).*

"Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you" (Titus 2:13-15).

GOD WORKS GOOD IN US AND HE WORKS GOOD THROUGH US

All of God's works are for our good: *"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).*

“And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers” (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

Jesus said, *“Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works” (John 14:10).*

“To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of His calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by His power” (2 Thessalonians 1:11)

“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8).

“Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all His energy that He powerfully works within me” (Colossians 1:28-29).

*“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, **for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.** Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain” (Philippians 2:12-16 ESV).*

ALL WORKS WILL BE EXPOSED

The works that all men do will come to light and be revealed: *“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed” (2 Peter 3:10).*

Just as *“the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8b).* We are to imitate Jesus, exposing the works of the devil: *“Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them” (Ephesians 5:11).*

There is coming a day when the Christian will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ and their works will be revealed. *“For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire” (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).*

“For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God” (John 3:20-21).

REMEMBER, YOU ARE WORKING FOR GOD

Jesus cleansed us from dishonor when He saved us; *“Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work” (2 Timothy 2:21).*

We need to remember that as a Believer, we are on earth as a laborer for God: *“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).*

“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3:23-24).

“For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for His name in serving the saints, as you still do” (Hebrews 6:10).

HOW SHOULD WE REACT TO DIFFICULT SITUATIONS?

How should we look at difficult situations in our lives? In speaking about the man who was born blind, the disciples looked at the situation with judgment, but *“Jesus answered, ‘It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him’” (John 9:3).* This is also how we should be seeing the difficulties and trials around us—future displays of the good and mighty works of God.

GOD EQUIPS US FOR THE WORK HE HAS FOR US TO DO

“And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-13).

God’s Word equips us: *“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).*

“And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a

manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:9-10).

“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word” (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17).

At the end of our lives, may we also be able to say to our Heavenly Father, as Jesus did, *“I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do” (John 17:4).*

EVEN SO, AMEN!