

Good Works

Ephesians 2:8-10

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

While John 3:16 surely is the most quoted verse in all of scripture, as evangelicals, we probably also quote Ephesians 2, verses 8 and 9 almost as much.

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

These words are simple and clear and to the point, and leave no room for question. The exact and only means, method and condition by which you and I can be saved is by “grace”, God’s “generous, free and totally unexpected, undeserved divine favor, love and pardon.

And I know that a clear understanding of these two verses is so very, very important because it has been my experience that most every person that I have witnessed to about their salvation, when ask “why God should allow them or any other person to come into His kingdom” has responded with some form of reasoning based on “good works”.

We hear words like, “well, I try my best to be as good as I can be. And, I try to treat people like I like to be treated myself. And, I believe that God will accept me because I try”.

And sadly, a similar response is also quite often given even among people who truly believe that they are saved. I’m speaking about that vast number of people who live here in our southern bible belt who walked down an isle and prayed the “sinner’s prayer” sometime back in their childhood years, but have since not given much time or effort to following on forward with their faith.

Their answer is often a two-part response. They say words like, “well, I believe in God, and I try my best to be as good as I can be.”

And the responses seem to be consistent. Each of them having some form of self-effort that must be added to God’s grace in order for a person to gain eternal life.

But may I quickly also say that these responses are not new. We see much the same response from the “rich young ruler” in Matthew 19. Listen, verse 16 . . .

16 Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" (Matthew 19:16)

Did you note the words he asked? He asked, "What good thing shall I do to have eternal life?"

There seems always to be a naturally occurring belief that we "must do something ourselves" before we can be saved.

Jesus of course knew the right answer for the young man, so He lovingly walked the young man through the steps toward a proper understanding.

And no, the young man, at that point in time, did not respond well, but who knows, perhaps later on, he did.

Keep in mind also, these gospels tell us on several occasions that Jesus was able to know the thoughts of the people around Him, and that was surely so with this young man. And He knew that the young man had not always done perfectly good works of righteousness. And He also knows that neither can you or I. That is why He later gave us these words of Ephesians 2 . . .

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Again, these are clear and plain words regarding "grace" and "good works". And though we should not make any mistakes in our handling of them, I do fear that we, that I do, and perhaps often.

In our zeal to give the right understanding about "grace", I, we perhaps leave people with wrong perceptions about the "works" spoken about here.

I must confess that most times I do leave off abruptly at the end of verse 9. And by doing that, I may sometimes leave a listener with a misunderstanding about whether or not "good works" are supposed to fit at all within the plans and purposes of God.

In trying so hard to convince our listeners that they cannot, and must not, try to work their way into heaven, perhaps I, we, are leaving them with the understanding that "good works" are actually to be avoided at all times.

But may I say to you, and to me, loudly and clearly, such is not the case. God surely does want you and me and all other believers to do "good works". And that understanding is given to us in verse 10 just as clearly and just as plainly as "grace" is explained for us in verses 8 and 9.

Here, verse 10 tells us in straightforward words that “good works” are the very reason why God has poured out His grace upon us and saved us. Listen!

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

You have heard it said that “God does not save us just to simply have us be placed on one of His trophy shelves to be looked at and admired”. And that is so very true. God has far greater plans and purposes for us. And those plans and purposes are expressed for us in the words “good works”.

And our “good works” are to be carried out in many different and varied ways all throughout our daily lives. Sometime they are demonstrated in the lifestyles that we live. We are to lead wholesome and Godly lives, walking daily in the ways of the Lord Jesus.

And as we do walk in His ways, we not only enjoy gentle and peaceful days ourselves, that same gentleness and peacefulness extends on down into the lives and behaviors of our children and our children’s children, our “good works” providing a living witness to influence them and others.

In the message last week, I spoke about attending my 50th high school reunion. Another thought that I have pondered is, as I walked among my classmates at that reunion, “What did they see as they looked at me?” From my appearance and behavior, did they think possibly that, “dark days had obviously befallen me, and wonder where things might have gone wrong for me? What was the “witness” that I presented to them?

In a conversation with friends the other night, one of the ladies said that she had read a book entitled, “I’ll have what she is having”, the implication being that one person is looking at another person and sees mannerisms and character traits and behaviors that they would like to have take place in their own life.

Do people look at you and me and say, “I want what he has, or what she has”? Is your Godly witness that obvious by your “good works”? And is it something that others would desire for themselves?

Or again, do they instead look at you or me and wonder what might have gone wrong?

May I say again to us that “works”, while never a means by which a person can earn their salvation, are still so vitally important, and are not only desired of us, but are indeed a commanded requirement from God. We are told in Matthew 5:16 . . .

16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

We sometimes hear criticisms of Christians that they “wear their religion on their shirtsleeve”. And while there are some people who may do that in a wrong manner, may I say that if your and my Christianity is not somewhere close to the surface in our daily life, if other people have to actually ask if we are a Christian, then we are probably doing something very wrong!

Those people who insist on their religion being a private matter, just between them and God have a serious misunderstanding of the scriptures. Again these words of Matthew 5:16 are plain and clear . . .

16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

And to be even more clear, the works that we do are not for the purpose of attracting attention to ourselves. As these words tell us, our good works are for the purpose of glorifying God the Father in heaven.

And to be sure, we will be held accountable for the works that we do, and that we don't do. And that accountability will be both in the days of this life and in the judgment to come.

And the accountability can be for the simplest of our behaviors, beginning with, “do we acknowledge Christ as God our Savior?” Matthew 10:32-33 (ESV)

32 . . . everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, 33 but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 10:32-33 (ESV)

Folks, these are frightening words, spoken by the Almighty God who created and sustains everything that exists. And we must understand that everything He says will take place.

Jesus is the only mediator between God and man, the one, the only mediator. And if He denies us before the Father then there is no other hope left for us.

And again, for those people who would dare insist that their religion be kept a private matter between them and God, will have no religion at all when they are denied before God the Father.

Our final and eternal accountability for doing “good works” is spoken about clearly in Revelation 20, when we stand before God in judgment. Listen to those words!

11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened.

And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. (Revelation 20:11-12)

Did you catch those words, “and the dead were judged according to their works?” Folks, there are “good works” for you and me to be doing, and we need to get about doing them!

So then, what are all those many “good works” that you and I must be getting about doing? To begin with, according to the commands of these scriptures, (and please do write them down as I give them) our “good works” should first demonstrate a deep love for our Lord, with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength (Deuteronomy 6:5 and Mark 12:30).

And our love for other people should be obvious (Mark 12:31 and John 13:34-35).

And we should spend private, intimate hours alone with God in our “prayer closet” (Matthew 6:6).

And then, our love for God should be shown to Him and to others in our faithful attendance and involvement at church (Hebrews 10:25).

Then, we should have a continual study of the Scriptures to show ourselves approved (2 Tim 2:15).

And we are also to give generously from our financial resources (Luke 6:38). And the list goes on and on.

Our “good works” begin with our response directly to God, but from there, our “good works” must then reach on out into all the many other things that take place in our ordinary daily activities.

Here in verse 10 of our text, God uses the word “walk”.

10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

This word, “walk” speaks about all the many common and ordinary activities and lifestyles that we involve ourselves in each day.

In other words, the “good works” of verse 10 are not limited to those “works” that are obviously “God focused” in nature, worship and prayer and the like, but are also to be seen in all the many moment by moment out-workings that flow forth from the deeper changes that God has wrought within our hearts, our souls, our minds . . . which leads us back to the words of Romans 12:1-2 that we studied last week.

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:1-2)

A person whose heart, soul and mind are truly surrendered to Christ will be completely transformed into a new creature. And the new nature that is formed in us will be clearly revealed in our attitudes and behaviors and “good works” done within the commonplace activities and trials of the day

In our salvation we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Simply put, you and I should “walk” with the very image of Christ showing through every fiber of our being and in every work of our hands.

And as I mentioned a moment ago . . . everyone that looks at us and at our “good works” should be able to say, “I’ll have whatever he or she is having”.

Our “light” should be so bright and so demanding that the words of Matthew 5:16 would always be taking place all around us as we walk through the activities of daily life.

And then, when we stand before Christ in judgment, He will say to us, (Matthew 25)

34 . . . 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 36 I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' 37 Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? 38 When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? 39 Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40 And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.' (Matthew 25:34-40)

These are “good works”! And Praise be to God, as the Spirit of Christ dwells within us, these things will flow out from us as naturally as the breaths that we take.

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