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GOOD WORKS

#199

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DO YOU THINK YOU HAVE ANY GOOD WORKS?

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

“Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works”—Titus 2:14.

WE shall not be afraid of leading any of you into a legal spirit this morning through what we shall say, for after our frequent exhortations to avoid anything like trusting in your works—attended as they have been, we trust, by the Holy Spirit—we are not afraid that you will so misunderstand us as to suppose that when we speak of good works today, we shall in any way whatsoever wish you to imagine that they can promote your eternal salvation. We labored when here the Sabbath morning before last, to let you know the difference between the two covenants, the covenant of grace¹ and the covenant of works.² We shall beg you to remember what we then said, and if by any slips

¹ **Covenant of grace** – God’s gracious, eternal purpose of redemption, conceived before the creation of the world, first announced in Genesis 3:15, progressively revealed in history, accomplished in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, and appropriated by faith in Him.

of ---- the tongue we should say anything that should look like legality,³ we beg you will put the two together, and wherein we shall err from the great truth of justification⁴ by faith to reject our testimony...

The children of God are a holy people. For this very purpose were they born and brought into the world: that they should be holy. For this, they were redeemed with blood and made a peculiar⁵ people. God's end in election, the end of all His purposes, is not answered until they become a people zealous of good works.

FIRST, THEN, WE ARE ABOUT TO ANSWER THE QUESTION, "WHAT ARE GOOD WORKS?" Now, I dare say we shall offend many here when we tell them what good works are; for in our opinion good works are the rarest things in the world. We believe we might walk for many a mile before we should see a good work at all. We use the word *good* now in its proper sense. There are many works that are good enough between man and man, but we shall use the word *good* in a higher sense today as regards God. We think we shall be able to show you that there are very few good works anywhere and that there are none out of the pale of Christ's church. We think, if we read Scripture rightly, that no work can be good unless it is commanded of God. How this cuts off a large portion of what men will do in order to win salvation! The Pharisee said he tithed mint, anise, and cummin.⁶ could he prove that God commanded him to tithe his mint, his anise, and his cummin? Perhaps not. He said he fasted so many times a week: could he prove that God told him to fast? If not, his fasting was no obedience. If I do a thing that I am not commanded to do, I do not obey in doing it. Vain then are all the pretenses of men, that by mortifying their bodies, by denying their flesh, by doing this, that, or the other, they shall therefore win the favor of God. No work is good unless God has commanded it. A man may build a long row of almshouses, but if he build without reference to the commandment, he has performed no good work.

Again, nothing is a good work unless it is done with a good motive; and there is no motive that can be said to be good but the glory of God. He, who performs good works with a view to save himself, does not do them from a good motive because his motive is selfish. He, who does them also to gain the esteem of his fellows and for the good of society, has a laudable motive as far as man is concerned; but it is, after all, an inferior motive. What end had we in view? If for the benefit of our fellow-creatures, then let our fellow-creatures pay us; but that has naught to do with God. Work is not good, unless a man does it with a view to God's glory. And no man can do it with a view to that until God has taught him what His glory is, and he has been brought into subjection to God's divine will, so that in everything he has an eye to the Most High and works in order to promote His glory and honor in the world.

And even, beloved, when our works are done from the best motives, nothing is a good work unless it is done with *faith*, for "without faith it is impossible to please him" (Heb 11:6). Like Cain, we may build the altar and lay the first fruits of the earth upon it, and it may appear an acceptable sacrifice in itself; but if destitute of the salt of faith, there it will lie. It will not be accepted by God, for without faith it is impossible to please Him. Bring me a man, who all his life long has been spending his health and strength for his fellow-creatures. Fetch me some public officer, who has fully discharged his trust, who has labored night and day, even to the wearing down of his constitution because he believed that England expected every man to do his duty, and he wished to do it. Bring me that man; let me see all his charitable works; let me witness the most lavish benevolence, the most profuse bounty. Tell me that he has always with a consistent motive labored for his country; and then, if he cannot answer this question, "Dost thou believe in the Son of God?" I shall be bound in all honesty to tell him that he has not done a solitary good work in all his life, so far as God is concerned.

Furthermore, when we have faith in God and perform all our works with the best of motives, even then we have not so much as a solitary good work, until the blood of Christ is sprinkled thereon. Looking on all that we have ever done in our lives, can we find a solitary thing that we dare call *good* until Christ's blood is put upon it? Grant there is something good about it—for the Spirit wrought it in our souls—there is much also that is evil about it. For even our best exercises are so terribly spoiled, marred, and ruined by the sins and imperfections that are in them that we dare not call them good, until Jesus Christ hath sprinkled them with His blood and taken the stain away. Oh, how often have I thought to myself, "Now, I have labored to preach God's Word. I have not spared at all

² **Covenant of works** – the covenant God established with Adam in the Garden of Eden before his fall into sin. It established man's obligation to obey God with the penalty of death for disobedience (Gen 2:16, 17).

³ **legality** – reliance on works for salvation rather than on God's free grace in Christ.

⁴ **justification** – "Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone"—Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. 32.

⁵ **peculiar** – special; *one's own*, as in God's own special people.

⁶ **mint, anise, and cummin or cumin** – *mint*: any of the aromatic Mentha garden plants used for seasoning; *anise*: dill, an evergreen aromatic plant used for spice and medicine; *cumin*: a cultivated plant in Palestine with seeds that have a bitter, warm taste and an aromatic flavor.

times before friends or foes, and I hope I have not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God!” And yet, beloved, how many of those sermons have not been good works at all because I had not an eye to my Master’s honor at the time or because there was not faith mixed with them. I preached in a desponding, low, miserable frame, or perhaps I had some natural aim, *even in the winning of souls*. For I have often feared, even when we rejoice to see souls converted, that we may have some evil motive, such as honoring ourselves, that the world may say, “See how many souls are brought to God by him!” And even when the church associates in doing holy works, have you not noticed that something selfish creeps in—a wish to exalt our own church, to glorify our own people, and to make ourselves mighty? I am sure, beloved, if you sit down and pull your good works to pieces, you will find so many bad stitches in them that they need to be all unstitched and done over again. There are so many spots and blurs⁷ about them, that you need to have them washed in the blood of Christ to make them good for anything.

And now, beloved, do you think you have any good works? “Oh!” you say, “I am afraid I have not many myself—nay, I know I have not. But thanks be unto His love, He Who accepted my person in Christ, accepts my works through Christ. And He who blessed me in Him, that I should be a chosen vessel, has been pleased to accept that which He Himself poured into the vessel, ‘to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made me accepted in the beloved’ ” (Eph 1:6).

And now, ye moralists,⁸ ye who have trusted in yourselves that ye are righteous: if what I have said be true, what has become of all your holiness? You are saying, “I am a charitable man.” Grant that you are! I tell you to go and appeal to your fellow-creatures, and let *them* pay you for your charity. You say, “Ay, but I am a consistent and moral man; I am a great credit to the country. If all men would act as I do, what a good thing for this world and generation!” Of course, you have served your generation. Then send in your bill, and let your generation pay you. I tell you, you have toiled for naught. You have only sown the wind, and likely enough, you will reap the whirlwind. *God owes you nothing*. You have not lived to His honor. You must honestly confess that you have not performed a single action with a desire to please Him. You have labored to please *yourself*—that has been the highest motive you have had...And as for your good works, where are they? Where are they? Ah! It is a figment and a fiction, a laugh and a dream. Good works in sinners? There are no such things. Augustine well said, “Good works, as they are called, in sinners are nothing but splendid sins.” This is true of the best works of the best man, who is out of Christ. They are nothing but splendid sins, varnished sins. God forgive you, dear friends, for your good works! *You have as great need to be forgiven for your good works as you have for your bad ones, if you are out of Christ*; for I reckon they are both alike, bad, if they come to be sifted.

From a sermon delivered on Sabbath morning, March 16, 1856, at New Park Street Chapel, Southwark. Reprinted by Pilgrim Publications.

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892): Influential English Baptist minister; history’s most widely read preacher, apart from those found in Scripture. Born at Kelvedon, Essex, England.

WORKS, GRACE, AND SALVATION

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them”—Ephesians 2:8-10.

WE ARE CHRISTIANS ENTIRELY AND SOLELY AS THE RESULT OF THE GRACE OF GOD. Let us remind ourselves once more that *grace* means “unmerited, undeserved favor.” It is an action that arises entirely from the gracious character of God. So the fundamental proposition is that salvation is something that comes to us entirely from God’s side. What is still more important is this: it not only comes from God’s side, it comes to us in spite of ourselves—“unmerited” favor. In other words, it is not God’s response to anything in us. Now there are many

⁷ **spots and blurs** – moral stains, disgraces; moral blemishes.

⁸ **moralists** – those who live by or teach a natural system of ethics; merely moral people.

people who seem to think that it is—that salvation is God’s response to something in us. But the word *grace* excludes that. It is in spite of us. The Apostle, as we have seen, has already been very much concerned to say this...Listen to him: “Even when we were dead in sins, [God] hath quickened⁹ us together with Christ,” and then, instead of going on to the next step—in parenthesis “(by grace ye are saved)” (Eph 2:5). Here, he puts it a little more explicitly. *Salvation is not in any sense God’s response to anything in us.* It is not something that we in any sense deserve or merit. The whole essence of the teaching at this point and everywhere in all the New Testament is that we have no sort or kind of right whatsoever to salvation, that the whole glory of salvation is that though we deserved nothing but punishment and hell and banishment out of the sight of God to all eternity, yet God, of His own love and grace and wondrous mercy, has granted us this salvation. Now that is the entire meaning of this term *grace*.

We need not stay with this because we have been dealing with it in the previous seven verses. What is the point of those verses? Is it not just to show us that very thing negatively and positively? What is the point of that horrible description of man by nature as the result of sin in the first three verses, if it is not just to show that man, as he is in sin, deserves nothing but retribution?¹⁰ He is a child of wrath by nature, and not only by nature but also by conduct, by his behavior, by his whole attitude to God—living according to the course of this world, governed by the prince of the power of the air. That is the sort of creature he is: dead in trespasses and sins, a creature of lusts, lusts of the flesh, “fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind” (Eph 2:3). There is no more appalling description possible than that. You cannot imagine a worse state than that. Does such a creature deserve *anything*? Has such a creature any right at all in the presence of God? Can he come forward with a plea or with a demand? *The whole point of the Apostle is to say that such a creature deserves nothing at the hands of God but retribution.* And then he works it out in his great contrast—“but God”...And the whole purpose of that, surely, is to exalt the grace and the mercy of God and to show that where man deserves nothing at all, God not only gives him, and gives him liberally, but *showers* upon him “the exceeding riches of his grace” (Eph 2:7).

THAT, THEREFORE, IS THE FIRST PRINCIPLE, THAT WE ARE CHRISTIANS SOLELY AND ENTIRELY AND ONLY BECAUSE OF THE GRACE OF GOD. I have referred to that fifth verse because it is extremely important in this whole argument. Notice the way the Apostle inserted it there, slipped it in, as it were, insinuated it. Why did he do so? Notice the context. He says that it was even “when we were dead in sins” that God quickened us. Then at once—“(by grace ye are saved).” If you do not see it at that point, you will see it at no point. What he has been saying is this: We were dead, which means without any life at all, without any ability, therefore. And the first thing that was necessary was that we should be given life, that we should be quickened. And he says that that is the very thing that God has done to us. Therefore, he says, “Can you not see it? It is by grace you are saved.” So he puts it in at that particular point obviously for that reason. It is the only conclusion one can draw. Creatures who were spiritually dead are now alive—how has it happened? Can a dead man raise himself? It is impossible. There is only one answer, “By grace ye are saved.” We come, therefore, to this inevitable conclusion: we are Christians at this moment *only and entirely by the grace of God.*

The Apostle was never tired of saying this. What else *could* he say? As he looked back on that blaspheming Saul of Tarsus, who hated Christ and the Christian Church and did his best to exterminate Christianity, breathing out threatenings and slaughter; as he looked back at that and then looked at himself as he now was, what could he say but this, “I am what I am by the grace of God?”¹¹ And I must confess it passes my comprehension to understand how any Christian looking at himself or herself can say anything different. If, when you get on your knees before God, you do not realize that you are “a debtor to mercy alone,”¹² I confess I do not understand you. There is something tragically defective, either in your sense of sin or in your realization of the greatness of God’s love. This is the running theme of the New Testament; it is the reason why the saints of the centuries have always praised the Lord Jesus Christ. They see that when they were utterly hopeless, indeed dead and vile and foul, “hateful and hating one another” (Tit 3:3) as Paul puts it in writing to Titus, then God looked upon them. It was “while we were yet sinners”, more, it was “while we were enemies” (Rom 5:8, 10) that we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son—at enmity, aliens in our minds, utterly opposed. Surely, we must see that it is by grace and by grace alone that we are Christians. It is utterly undeserved; it is only as the result of the goodness of God.

⁹ **quickened** – made alive; the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit called the “new birth.”

¹⁰ **retribution** – a justly deserved penalty.

¹¹ Cf. 1Co 15:10a; Acts 7:58; 8:1-3; 9:1-22; 22:1-21; 26:1-29.; Phi 3:1-15.

¹² From the hymn by Augustus Toplady (1740-1778), *A Debtor to Mercy Alone*, in the *Gospel Magazine*, 1771.

THE SECOND PROPOSITION, AS I HAVE INDICATED, IS PUT BY THE APOSTLE IN A NEGATIVE FORM. He says that the fact that we are Christians gives us no grounds whatsoever for boasting. That is the negative of the first proposition. The first is that we are Christians solely and entirely as the result of the grace of God. Therefore, secondly, we must say that the fact that we are Christians gives us no grounds whatsoever for boasting. The Apostle puts that in two statements. The first is, “that not of yourselves.” But he is not content with that; he must put it still more explicitly in these words, “Lest any man should boast.” There we have two vitally important statements. Surely, nothing could be stronger than this: “Not of yourselves: lest any man should boast.” This must always be the crucial test of our view of salvation and of what makes us Christians.

Let us then examine ourselves for a moment. What is your idea of yourself as a Christian? How have you become a Christian? What is it dependent upon? What is the background, what is the reason? That is the crucial question, and according to the Apostle, the vital test. Does your idea of how you have become a Christian give you any grounds whatsoever for being proud of yourself, for boasting? Does it in any way reflect credit upon you? If it does, according to this statement—and I do not hesitate to say it—you *are not a Christian*. “Not of yourselves: lest any man should boast.” In the third chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, the Apostle puts it still more plainly. He asks his question. Here, he says, is God’s way of salvation, and then he asks in verse 27, “Where is boasting then?” He answers by saying, “It is excluded,” it is put out through the door and the door locked on it. There is no room for it here at all.

It is not surprising that the Apostle Paul is so fond of putting it in that particular way because before his conversion, before he became a Christian, he knew a great deal about boasting. There was never a more self-satisfied person or a more self-assured person than Saul of Tarsus. He was proud of himself in every respect—proud of his nationality, proud of the particular tribe into which he had been born in Israel, proud of the fact that he had been brought up as a Pharisee¹³ and had sat at the feet of Gamaliel,¹⁴ proud of his religion, proud of his morality, proud of his knowledge. He tells us all about it in the third chapter of the Epistle to the Philippians. He would boast. He would stand up and say, as it were, “Who can challenge this?” Here I am, a good and a moral and a religious man. Look at me in my religious duties, look at me in my life, look at me in every respect; I have given myself to this godly, holy living, and I am satisfying God. That was his attitude. He was boasting. He felt that he was such a man and had lived in such a way that he could be proud of it. It was one of his great words. But he came to see that one of the biggest differences that becoming a Christian made to him was that all that was put out and rendered irrelevant. That is why he used rather strong language. Looking back on all that in which he had boasted so much, he says, “It is dung and loss!” He is not content to say that it was wrong; it is vile, it is filthy, it is foul. Boasting? Excluded! But the Apostle knows the danger at this point so well that he does not content himself with a general statement; he indicates two particular respects in which we are most liable to boast.

The first is this question of works: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” It is always in connection with works that we are most liable to boast. It is at that point that the devil tempts us all in a most subtle manner. Works! That was why the Pharisees were the greatest enemies of Jesus Christ: not because they were mere talkers, but because they really *did* things. When that Pharisee said, “I fast twice in the week,” he was speaking the truth. When he said, “I give tithes of all that I possess,” it was strictly accurate (Luke 18:9). The Pharisees were not merely talkers, they really did these things. And it was because of this that they so resented the preaching of the Son of God and were most responsible for His crucifixion. Is it going too far to say that it is always more difficult to convert a good person than a bad one? I think the history of the Church proves that. The greatest opponents of evangelical religion have always been good and religious people. Some of the most cruel persecutors in the history of the Church have belonged to this class. The saints have always suffered most acutely at the hands of good, moral, religious people. Why? Because of works. The evangelical Gospel always denounces reliance upon works and pride of works and boasting about works, and such people cannot stand it. Their whole position has been built up on that—what they are and what they have done and what they have always been doing. This is their whole position; and if you take that from them, they have nothing. They therefore hate such preaching, and they will fight it to the last ditch. The Gospel makes paupers of us all. It condemns us every one. It strips us all naked. There is no difference, Paul argues everywhere, there is no difference between the Gentile, who is outside the pale, and the religious Jew, in the sight of God—

¹³ **Pharisee** – a member of an ancient Jewish sect noted for strict obedience to Jewish traditions.

¹⁴ **Gamaliel** – famous Jewish scholar who lived in the 1st Century A. D. and thought to be the grandson of the famous Rabbi Hillel; a Pharisee, a doctor of the law, and a member of the Sanhedrin, the high council of Jews in Jerusalem; mentioned in Acts 5:33-40.

“There is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom 3:10). So works must go out, they must not be boasted of. But we tend to boast of them—our good living, our good deeds, our religious observances, our attendance at services (and particularly if we do so early in the morning), and so on. These are the things, our religious activities, *these make us Christian*. That is the argument.

But the Apostle exposes and denounces all that, and he does so very simply in this way: he says that to talk about works is to go back under the Law. If you think, he says, that it is your good life that makes you a Christian, you are putting yourself back under the Law. But that is a futile thing to do, he says, for this reason: if you put yourself back under the Law you are condemning yourself, for “by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20). If you want to try to justify yourself by your life and by your works, you are walking straight to condemnation because the best works of man are not good enough in the sight of God. The Law has condemned all—“All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). “There is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom 3:10). So do not be foolish, says Paul; do not turn away from grace, for in so doing you are turning to condemnation. No man’s works will ever be sufficient to justify him in the sight of God. How foolish, therefore, to go back under works!

But not only that, he explains further in the tenth verse that it is to put things the wrong way round. Such people think that by their good works they make themselves Christian, whereas Paul says, *it is exactly the other way round*. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” The tragedy is that people think that if only they do certain things and avoid certain things, and live a good life and go out and help others, in that way they will become Christian. “What blindness!” says Paul. The way to look at good works is this. *God makes us Christians in order that we may do good works*. It is not a question of good works leading to Christianity, but Christianity leading to good works. It is the exact opposite of what people tend to believe. There is nothing, therefore, that is such a complete contradiction of the true Christian position as this tendency to boast of works and to think that because we are what we are and are doing what we are doing, we are making ourselves Christian. No! *God makes Christians, and then they go on to do their good works*. Boasting is excluded. “Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith” (Rom 3:27). We see that works are excluded in the matter of becoming Christian. We must not boast of our works. If we are in any way conscious of our goodness, or if we are relying upon anything that we have done, we are *denying the grace of God*. It is the opposite of Christianity.

But alas, it is not only works and deeds that tend to insinuate themselves. There is something else—faith! Faith tends to come in and to make us boast. There is great controversy about this eighth verse—“For by grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.” The great question is, what does the “that” refer to? And there are two schools of opinion. “For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that (faith) not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,” says the one school. But according to the other view, the “that” does not refer to the “faith” but to the “grace” at the beginning of the sentence: “For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that (this position of grace) not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.” Is it possible to settle the dispute? It is not.¹⁵ It is not a question of grammar; it is not a question of language...It is a question that cannot be decided. And there is a sense in which it really does not matter at all because it comes to much the same thing in the end. In other words, what is important is that we should avoid turning faith into “works.”

But there are many people who do that. They turn their *faith* into a kind of works. Indeed, there is quite a popular evangelistic teaching at the present time which says that the difference which the New Testament makes can be put in this way. In the Old Testament, God looked at the people and said, “Here is my Law, here are the Ten Commandments, keep them, I will forgive you, and you will be saved.” But, it goes on to say, it is not like that now. God has put all that on one side; there is no longer any Law. God simply says to us, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,” and if you do, you will be saved. In other words, they say that by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ *a man saves himself*. But that is to turn faith into works because it says it is our action that saves us. But the Apostle says “Not of yourselves.” Whether the “that” refers to faith or to grace, it does not matter; “you are saved,” says Paul, “by grace, and that not of yourselves.” If it is my belief that saves me, *I have saved myself*. But Paul says that it is *not* of yourself, so that I must never speak of my faith in a way that makes it “of myself.” And not only that. If I become a Christian in that way, again surely it gives me some grounds for boasting; but Paul says, “Not of works, lest any man should boast.” My boasting must be entirely excluded.

¹⁵ Some authorities of the Greek language believe that *that* refers to the entire phrase “For by grace are ye saved through faith,” which *includes* faith.

As we think of faith, we must be careful, therefore, to view it in this light. Faith is not the *cause* of salvation. *Christ is the cause of salvation.* The grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ is the cause of salvation, and I must never speak in such a way as to represent faith as the cause of my salvation. What is faith then? Faith is but the instrument through which it comes to me. “By grace are ye saved, through faith.” Faith is the channel, it is the instrument through which this salvation which is of the grace of God comes to me. I am saved by grace, “through faith.” It is just the medium through which the grace of God bringing salvation enters into my life. We must always be extremely careful, therefore, never to say that it is our believing that saves us. Belief does not save. Faith does not save. *Christ saves*—Christ and His finished work. Not my belief, not my faith, not my understanding, nothing that I do—“not of yourselves,” “boasting is excluded,” “by grace, through faith.”

Surely, the whole point of the first three verses of this chapter is to show that no other position is at all possible. How can a man who is “dead” in trespasses and sins save himself? How can a man who is an “enemy and alienated in his mind,” whose heart is “at enmity against God” (for that is what we are told about the natural man), how can such a man do anything that is meritorious? It is *impossible*. The first thing that happens to us, the Apostle has told us in verses 4 to 7, is that we have been “quickened.” New life has been put into us. Why? Because without life we can do nothing. The first thing the sinner needs is life. He cannot ask for life, for he is dead. God gives him life, and he proves that he has it by believing the Gospel. Quickening is the first step. It is the first thing that happens. I do not ask to be quickened. If I asked to be quickened, I would not need to be quickened; I would already have life. But I am dead, and I am an enemy, and I am opposed to God; I do not understand, and I hate. But God *gives* me life. He has quickened me together *with* Christ. Therefore, boasting is entirely excluded, boasting of works, boasting even of faith. It *must* be excluded. Salvation is altogether of God.

That brings us to the last principle, which I summarize in this way: *our being Christians is entirely the result of God’s work.* The real trouble with many of us is that our conception of what it is that makes us Christian is so low, is so poor. It is our failure to realize the *greatness* of what it means to be a Christian. Paul says, “We are his workmanship”! It is *God* Who has done something, it is *God* Who is working; we are His workmanship. Not our works, *His* work. So, I say again, it is not our good life, and all our efforts, and hoping to be a Christian at the end, that makes us Christians.

But let me go further. It is not our decision, our “deciding for Christ” that makes us Christians either: that is our work. Decision does come into it, but it is not our decision that *makes* us Christians. Paul says we are *His* workmanship. And thus, you see how grievously our loose thinking and our loose speaking misrepresent Christianity! I remember a very good man—yes, a good Christian man—whose way of giving his testimony was always this: “I decided for Christ thirty years ago, and I have never regretted it.” That was his way of putting it. That is not Paul’s way of describing becoming Christian. “We are his workmanship”! *That* is the emphasis. Not something *I* have gone in for, not something *I* have decided, but something that God has done to me. He might better have put it like this: “Thirty years ago, I was dead in trespasses and sins, but God began to do something to me; I became aware of God dealing with me; I felt God smashing me; I felt the hands of God re-making me.” That is Paul’s way of putting it; not, *I* decided, not, *I* went in for Christianity, not, *I* decided to follow Christ, not at all. That comes in, but that is later.

We are *His* workmanship. A Christian is a person in whom God has worked. And you notice what kind of work it is according to Paul. It is nothing less than a *creation*. “Created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” The Apostle is very fond of saying this. Listen to him saying it to the Philippians: “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (1:6). God! He has begun a good work in *you*! It is God’s work! He came when you were dead, and He quickened you, He put life into you. *That* is what makes a man a Christian. Not your good works, not your decision, but God’s determination concerning you put into practice.

It is here [that] we see how our ideas of what the Christian is fall hopelessly short of the biblical teaching. A Christian is a *new creation*. He is not just a good man or a man who has been improved somewhat; he is a new man, “created in Christ Jesus.” He has been put into Christ, and the life of Christ has come into him. We are “partakers of the divine nature,” says the Apostle Peter (2Pe 1:4). “Partakers of the divine nature”! What is a Christian? A good man, a moral man, a man who believes certain things? Yes, but infinitely more! He is a *new* man; the life of God has come into his soul—“created in Christ,” “God’s workmanship”! Had you realized that that is what makes you a Christian? It is not attending a place of worship. It is not doing certain duties. These things are all excellent, but they can *never* make us Christians (They could make us Pharisees!). It is God Who makes Christians, and He

does it in this way. He created everything out of nothing at the beginning, and He comes to man, and He makes him anew and gives him a new nature, making a new man of him. A Christian is “a new creation,” nothing less.

“If you are interested in works,” says Paul, “I will tell you the sort of works that God is interested in.” It is not the miserable works that you can do as a creature in sin by nature. It is a new kind of work—“created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them”—*God’s good works!* What does he mean? He means that our trouble is not only that our notion of Christianity is inadequate, [but] our notion of *good works* is still more inadequate. Put down on paper the good works that people think are good enough to make them Christian. Get them to put them all down on paper, all those things on which they are relying. Put them on paper, and then take them to God and say, “This is what I have done.” The thing is laughable; it is monstrous. Look at what they are doing! They are not the good works in which God is interested. What are God’s good works? Well, the Sermon on the Mount and the life of Jesus Christ provide the answer: not just a little negative goodness and morality, not perhaps doing an occasional kindness and being very conscious of it—no! Disinterested¹⁶ love! “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phi 2:5-8)—giving Himself for others without counting the cost. Those are *God’s good works*. Loving God with all the heart and soul and mind and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves! Not doing him an occasional good turn, but loving him as yourself! Forgetting yourself in your concern for him! *Those* are God’s good works. And those are the works for which He has created us.

From *Ephesians: God’s Way of Reconciliation* (2:1-22), pp. 129-139, published by The Banner of Truth Trust, www.banneroftruth.org. Used by permission.

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981): Perhaps the greatest expository preacher of the 20th century. Successor to G. Campbell Morgan as minister of Westminster Chapel, London, England, 1938-68. Born in Newcastle Emlyn, Wales.

“The adornment of good works, the adornment in which we hope to enter heaven, is the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ; but the adornment of a Christian here below is his holiness, his piety, his consistency. If some people had a little more piety, they would not require such a showy dress; if they had a little more godliness to set them off, they would have no need whatever to be always decorating themselves. The best earrings that a woman can wear are the earrings of hearing the Word with attention. The very best ring that we can have upon our finger is the ring that the father puts upon the finger of the prodigal son, when he is brought back; and the very best dress we can ever wear is a garment wrought by the Holy Spirit, the garment of a consistent conduct. But it is [amazing], while many are taking all the trouble they can to array this poor body, they have very few ornaments for their soul; they forgot to dress the soul.”—*C. H. Spurgeon*

THE SCRIPTURES AND GOOD WORKS

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works”—2Ti 3:16, 17.

MEN, left to themselves, have ever found it impossible to keep the even line of truth between what appear to be conflicting doctrines, such as the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man; election by grace and the universal proclamation of the Gospel; the justifying faith of Paul and the justifying works of James. Only too often, where the absolute sovereignty of God has been insisted upon, it has been to the ignoring of man’s accountability; and where unconditional election has been held fast, the unfettered preaching of the Gospel to the unsaved has been let slip. On the other hand, where human accountability has been upheld and an evangelical ministry been sustained, the sovereignty of God and the truth of election have generally been whittled down or completely

¹⁶ **disinterested** – free of self-interest.

ignored.

Many of our readers have witnessed examples that illustrate the truth of what has been said above, but few seem to realize that exactly the same difficulty is experienced when an attempt is made to show the precise relation between faith and good works. If, on the one hand, some have erred in attributing to good works a place that Scripture does not warrant, certain it is that, on the other hand, some have failed to give to good works the province¹⁷ that Scripture assigns them. If, on the one side, it be serious error to ascribe our justification before God to any performances of ours, on the other side, they are equally guilty who deny that good works are necessary in order to our reaching heaven and allow nothing more than that they are merely evidences or fruits of our justification. We are well aware that we are now (shall we say) treading on thin ice and running a serious risk of ourselves being charged with heresy. Nevertheless, we deem it expedient to seek Divine aid in grappling with this difficulty, and then commit the issues thereof to God Himself.

In some quarters, the claims of faith, though not wholly denied, have been disparaged¹⁸ because of a zeal to magnify good works. In other circles, reputed as orthodox (and they are what we now have chiefly in mind), only too rarely are good works assigned their proper place, and far too infrequently are professing Christians urged with apostolic earnestness to maintain them. No doubt, this is due at times to a fear of undervaluing faith and encouraging sinners in the fatal error of trusting to their own doings rather than to and in the righteousness of Christ. But no such apprehensions should hinder a preacher from declaring “all the counsel of God”...Let him not forget that Divine command, “Affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works” (Tit 3:8).

The last-quoted Scripture is the most pertinent one for these days of looseness and laxity,¹⁹ of worthless profession, and empty boasting. This expression “good works” is found in the New Testament in the singular or plural number no less than thirty times; yet, from the rarity with which many preachers, who are esteemed sound in the faith, use, emphasize, and enlarge upon them, many of their hearers would conclude that those words occur but once or twice in all the Bible... Now in Ephesians 2:8–10, God has joined two most vital and blessed things together which ought never to be separated in our hearts and minds, yet they are most frequently parted in the modern pulpit. How many sermons are preached from the first two of these verses, which so clearly declare salvation to be by grace through faith and not of works? Yet how seldom are we reminded that the sentence that begins with grace and faith is only completed in verse 10, where we are told, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

We began this series²⁰ by pointing out that the Word of God may be taken up from various motives and read with different designs, but that 2 Timothy 3:16, 17, makes known for what these Scriptures are really “profitable,” namely for doctrine or teaching, for reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness, and all of these that “the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works”. . . let us now consider *how* these furnish us unto “all good works.” Here is another vital criterion by which an honest soul, with the help of the Holy Spirit, may ascertain whether or not his reading and study of the Word is really benefiting him.

We profit from the Word when we are thereby taught *the true place of good works.* “Many persons, in their eagerness to support orthodoxy as a system, speak of salvation by grace and faith in such a manner as to undervalue holiness and a life devoted to God. But there is no ground for this in the Holy Scriptures. The same Gospel that declares salvation to be freely by the grace of God through faith in the blood of Christ, and asserts in the strongest terms that sinners are justified by the righteousness of the Savior imputed to them on their believing in Him without any respect to works of Law, also assures us that without holiness no man shall see God; that believers are cleansed by the blood of atonement; that their hearts are purified by faith, which works by love and overcomes the world; and that the grace that brings salvation to all men, teaches those who receive it that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, they should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. Any fear that the doctrine of grace will suffer from the most strenuous inculcation²¹ of good works on a scriptural foundation betrays an inadequate and greatly defective acquaintance with Divine truth. And any tampering with the Scriptures in order to silence their testimony in favor of the fruits of righteousness, as absolutely necessary in the

¹⁷ province – function.

¹⁸ disparaged – to treat something lower than it is.

¹⁹ laxity – the condition of being not strict or careful enough.

²⁰ A. W. Pink, *Profiting from the Word*, available as a paperback from Chapel Library.

²¹ inculcation – teaching or impressing upon the mind by frequent instruction or repetition.

Christian, is a perversion and forgery with respect to the Word of God.”²²

But what force (ask some) has this ordination or command of God unto good works, when, notwithstanding it, though we fail to apply ourselves diligently unto obedience, we shall nevertheless be justified by the imputation of Christ’s righteousness, and so may be saved without them? Such a senseless objection proceeds from utter ignorance of the believer’s present state and relation to God. To suppose that the hearts of the regenerate are not as much and as effectually influenced with the authority and commands of God unto obedience as if they were given in order unto their justification is to ignore what true faith is, and what are the arguments and motives whereby the minds of Christians are principally affected and constrained. Moreover, it is to lose sight of the inseparable connection that God has made between our justification and our sanctification;²³ to suppose that one of these may exist without the other is to *overthrow the whole Gospel*. The Apostle deals with this very objection in Romans 6:1–3.

We profit from the Word when we are thereby taught *the absolute necessity of good works*. If it be written that “without shedding of blood is no remission” (Heb 9:22) and “without faith it is impossible to please him” (Heb 11:6), the Scripture of Truth also declares, “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb 12:14). The life lived by the saints in heaven is but the completion and consummation of that life which, after regeneration, they live here on earth. The difference between the two is not one of kind, but of *degree*. “The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Pro 4:18). If there has been no walking with God *down here*, there will be no dwelling with God *up there*. If there has been no real communion with Him in time, there will be none with Him in eternity. Death effects no vital change to the heart. True, at death the remainders of sin are forever left behind by the saint, but no new nature is then imparted. If then he did not hate sin and love holiness before death, he certainly will not do so afterwards.

No one really desires to go to hell, though there are few indeed who are willing to forsake that broad road which inevitably leads there. All would like to go to heaven, but are professing Christians really willing and determined to walk that narrow way which alone leads thereto? *It is at this point that we may discern the precise place that good works have in connection with salvation*. They do not merit it, yet they are inseparable from it. They do not procure a title to heaven, yet they are among the means that God has appointed for His people’s getting there. In no sense are good works the procuring cause of eternal life, but they are part of the means (as are the Spirit’s work within us and repentance, faith, and obedience by us) conducing²⁴ to it. God has appointed the way wherein we must walk in order to our arriving at the inheritance purchased for us by Christ. A life of daily obedience to God is that which alone gives actual admission to the enjoyment of what Christ has purchased for His people—admission now by faith, admission at death, or His return in full actuality.

We profit from the Word when we are taught thereby *the true nature of good works*...The true nature of “good works” was perfectly exemplified by the Lord Jesus. All that He did was done in obedience to His Father. He “pleased not himself” (Rom 15:3), but ever performed the bidding of the One Who had sent Him (Joh 6:38). He could say, “I do always those things that please him” (Joh 8:29). There were no limits to Christ’s subjection to the Father’s will: He “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phi 2:8). So too, all that He did proceeded from love to the Father and love to His neighbor. Love is the fulfilling of the Law; without love, compliance with the Law is naught but servile subjection,²⁵ and that cannot be acceptable to Him Who is Love. Proof that all Christ’s obedience flowed from love is found in His words, “I delight to do thy will, O my God” (Psa 40:8). So also, all that Christ did had in view the glory of the Father: “Father, glorify thy name” (Joh 12:28) revealed the object constantly before Him.

We profit from the Word when we are taught thereby *the true scope of good works*. This is so comprehensive as to include the discharge of our duties in every relationship in which God has placed us. It is interesting and instructive to note the first “good work” (as so described) in Holy Writ, namely, the anointing of the Savior by Mary of Bethany (Mat 26:10; Mar 14:6). Indifferent alike to the blame or praise of men, with eyes only for the “chiefest among ten thousand,” she lavished upon Him her precious ointment. Another woman, Dorcas (Act 9:36), is also mentioned as “full of good works”; after worship comes service, glorifying God among men and benefiting others.

²² Alexander Carson (1766-1844) – Irish Baptist pastor; author of *Baptism, Its Mode and Subjects* and numerous other titles.

²³ **sanctification** – “Sanctification is the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness”—Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. 35.

²⁴ **conducing** – tending to bring about.

²⁵ **servile subjection** – slave-like, groveling submission.

“That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work” (Col 1:10). The bringing up (not “dragging” up!) of children, lodging (spiritual) strangers, washing the saints’ feet (ministering to their temporal comforts), and relieving the afflicted (1Ti 5:10) are spoken of as “good works.” Unless our reading and study of the Scriptures is making us better soldiers of Jesus Christ, better citizens of the country in which we sojourn, better members of our earthly homes (kinder, gentler, more unselfish), “thoroughly furnished unto all good works,” it is profiting us little or nothing.

From “The Scriptures and Good Works” in *Profiting from the Word* reprinted by Chapel Library. This chapter is also available as a small booklet.

A.W. Pink (1886-1952): Pastor, itinerate Bible teacher, author of *Studies in the Scriptures* and numerous books, including his well-known *The Sovereignty of God*. Born in Great Britain, immigrated to the U.S., and later returned to his homeland in 1934. Born in Nottingham, England.

GOOD WORKS AND THE JUSTIFIED

Horatius Bonar (1808-1889)

“Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt”—Romans 4:4.

DOES [Paul] by this speech make light of good works? Does he encourage an unholy walk? Does he use a rash word, which had better been left unspoken? No, truly, *he is laying the foundation of good works*. He is removing the great obstacle to a holy life, viz.,²⁶ the bondage of an unforgiven state. He is speaking, by the power of the Holy Ghost, the words of truth and soberness. The difference between working and believing is that which God would have us to learn, lest we confound these two things and so destroy them both. The order and relation of these two things are here very explicitly laid down, so as to anticipate the error of many who mix up working and believing together, or who make believing the result of working, instead of working the result of believing. We carefully distinguish, yet we as carefully connect the two. We do not put asunder what God has joined together; yet we would not reverse the divine order, nor disturb the divine relation, nor place that last which God has set first.

It was not to depreciate or discourage good works that the Apostle spoke of not working, but believing; or of a man being “justified by faith without the deeds of the law”; or of God imputing “righteousness without works” (Rom 3:28; 4:6). It was to distinguish things that differ. It was to show the true use of faith in connecting us for justification with what another has done. It was to stay us from doing anything in order to be justified. In this view, then, faith is truly a ceasing from work and not a working. It is not the doing of anything in order to be justified, but the simple reception of the justifying work of Him Who finished transgression and made an end of sin (Dan 9:24). For *the one justifying work* was completed eighteen hundred years ago, and any attempt on our part to repeat or imitate this is vain. The one cross suffices.

Nor was it to undervalue good works that our Lord gave, what many may deem such a singular answer to the question of the Jews, “What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?...This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (Joh 6:28, 29). They wanted to work their way into the favor of God. The Lord tells them that they may have that favor without waiting or working by accepting at once His testimony to His only-begotten Son. Until then, they were not in a condition for working. They were as trees without a root, as stars whose motions, however regular, would be useless, if they themselves were unlighted.

To say to a groping, troubled spirit, “You must first believe before you can work,” is no more to encourage ungodliness or laxity of walk, than to say to an imprisoned soldier, “You must first get out of your dungeon before you can fight”; or to a swimmer, “You must throw off that millstone before you can attempt to swim”; or to a racer, “You must get quit of these fetters before you can run the race.” Yet these expressions of the Apostle have often been shrunk from, dreaded as dangerous, quoted with a guarding clause, or rather cited as seldom as possible, under the secret feeling that unless greatly diluted or properly qualified, they had better not be cited at all. But

²⁶ viz. – that is.

why are these bold utterances there, if they are perilous, if they are not meant to be as fearlessly proclaimed now as they were fearlessly written eighteen centuries ago? What did the Holy Spirit mean by promulgation²⁷ of such “unguarded” statements, as some seem disposed to reckon them? It was not for nothing that they were so boldly spoken. Timid words would not have served the purpose. The glorious Gospel needed statements such as these to disentangle the great question of acceptance, to relieve troubled consciences and purge them from dead works, yet at the same time to give to works their proper place...

In another’s righteousness we stand, and by another’s righteousness are we justified. All accusations against us, founded upon our unrighteousness, we answer by pointing to the perfection of the righteousness that covers us from head to foot...

Protected by this perfection, we have no fear of wrath, either now or hereafter. It is a buckler to us; and we cry, “Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed” (Psa 84:9), as if to say, “Look not on me, but on my Substitute. Deal not with me for sin, but with my Sin-bearer. Challenge not me for my guilt, but challenge Him; He will answer for me.” Thus, we are safe beneath the shield of His righteousness. No arrow, either from the enemy or from conscience, can reach us there.

Covered by this perfection, we are at peace. The enemy cannot invade us; or if he try to do so, we can triumphantly repel him. It is a refuge from the storm, a covert from the tempest, a river of water in a dry place, the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. The work of righteousness is peace; and in the Lord we have righteousness and strength.

Beautified with this perfection, which is the perfection of God, we find favor in His sight. His eye rests on the comeliness²⁸ that He has put upon us; and as He did at viewing the first creation, so now, in looking at us as clothed with this divine excellency, He pronounces it “very good.” He sees no iniquity in Jacob and no transgression in Israel (Num 23:21). “The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found” (Jer 50:20). This righteousness suffices to cover, to comfort, and to beautify.

But there is more than this: we are justified that we may be holy. The possession of this legal righteousness is the beginning of a holy life. *We do not live a holy life in order to be justified; but we are justified that we may live a holy life.* That which man calls holiness may be found in almost any circumstances of dread, or darkness, or bondage, or self-righteous toil and suffering; but that which God calls holiness can only be developed under conditions of liberty and light, and pardon and peace with God. Forgiveness is the mainspring of holiness. Love, as a motive, is far stronger than law, far more influential than fear of wrath or peril of hell. Terror may make a man crouch like a slave and obey a hard master, lest a worse thing come upon him; but only a sense of forgiving love can bring either heart or conscience into that state in which obedience is either pleasant to the soul or acceptable to God.

False ideas of holiness are common, not only among those who profess false religions, but among those who profess the true. For holiness is a thing of which man by nature has no more idea than a blind man has of the beauty of a flower or the light of the sun. All false religions have had their “holy men,” whose holiness often consisted merely in the amount of pain they could inflict upon their bodies, or of food which they could abstain from, or of hard labor which they could undergo. But with God, a saint or holy man is a very different being. It is in filial,²⁹ full-hearted love to God that much of true holiness consists. And this cannot even begin to be until the sinner has found forgiveness and tasted liberty and has confidence towards God. The spirit of holiness is incompatible with the spirit of bondage. There must be the spirit of liberty, the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, “Abba, Father” (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6). When the fountain of holiness begins to well up in the human heart and to fill the whole being with its transforming, purifying power, “We have known and believed the love that God hath to us” (1Jo 4:16) is the first note of the holy song that commenced on earth and [is] perpetuated through eternity.

We are bought with a price that we may be new creatures in Christ Jesus. We are forgiven that we may be like Him, Who forgives us. We are set at liberty and brought out of prison that we may be holy. The free, boundless love of God, pouring itself into us, expands and elevates our whole being; and we serve Him, not in order to win His favor, but because we have already won it in simply believing His record concerning His Son. If the root is

²⁷ **promulgation** – publishing; making known by open declaration.

²⁸ **comeliness** – pleasing appearance; gracefulness or beauty of form.

²⁹ **filial** – having or assuming the relationship of child or offspring to parent.

holy, so are the branches. We have become connected with the holy root and by the necessity of this connection are made holy too.

Forgiveness relaxes no law nor interferes with the highest justice. Human pardons may often do so: God's pardons never. *Forgiveness* doubles all our bonds to a holy life, only they are no longer bonds of iron, but of gold. It takes off the heavy yoke in order to give us the light and easy. *Love is stronger than law*. Whatever connects our obedience with love must be far more influential than what connects us with law.

The love of God to us and our love to God work together for producing holiness in us. Terror accomplishes no real obedience. Suspense brings forth no fruit unto holiness. Only the certainty of love, forgiving love, can do this. It is this certainty that melts the heart, dissolves our chains, disburdens our shoulders so that we stand erect, and makes us to run in the way of the divine commandments.

Condemnation is that which binds sin and us together. Forgiveness looses this fearful tie and separates us from sin. The power of condemnation which the Law possesses is that which makes it so strong and terrible. Cancel this power, and the liberated spirit rises into the region of love and in that region finds both will and strength for the keeping of the Law, a law which is at once old and new: *old* as to substance—"Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart" (Deu 6:5)—*new* as to mode and motive—"for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom 8:2); that is, the law of the life-giving Spirit, which we have in Christ Jesus, has severed the condemning connection of that Law which leads only to sin and death. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh (*i.e., unable to carry out its commandments in our old nature*), God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom 8:3, 4).

The removal of condemnation is the dissolution of legal bondage and of that awful pressure upon the conscience that at once enslaved and irritated; disabling as well as disinclining us from all obedience; making holiness both distasteful and dreadful, to be submitted to only through fear of future woe...But the message, "God is love," is like the sun bursting through the clouds of a long tempest. The good news, "Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins" (Act 13:38), is like the opening of the prisoner's dungeon gate. Bondage departs, and liberty comes. Suspicion is gone, and the heart is won. Perfect love has cast out fear (1Jo 4:18). We hasten to the embrace of Him Who loved us; we hate that which has estranged us; we put away all that caused the distance between us and Him; we long to be like one so perfect and to partake of His holiness. To be "partakers of the divine nature" (2Pe 1:4), once so distasteful, is henceforth most grateful and pleasant; and nothing seems now so desirable as to escape the corruptions that are in the world through lust.

We undergo many false changes, which look like holiness, but which are not really so...Time changes us, yet does not make us holy. The decays of age change us, but do not break the power of evil. One lust expels another; frailty succeeds to frailty; error drives out error; one vanity pails, another comes freshly in its room; one evil habit is exchanged for a second, but our [flesh] remains the same. The cross has not touched us with its regenerating power; the Holy Spirit has not purified the inner sources of our being and life.

Fashion changes us; the example of friends changes us; society changes us; excitement changes us; business changes us; affection changes us; sorrow changes us; dread of coming evil changes us; yet the heart is just what it was. Of the numerous changes in our character or deportment, how many are deceitful, how few are real and deep! Only that which can go down into the very depths of our spiritual being can produce any change that is worthy of the name.

The one spell³⁰ that can really transform us is THE CROSS. The one potent watchword is, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (Joh 12:32)... "For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth" (Joh 17:19). Christ presents Himself as the Holy One, Consecrated One, to God that His people may partake of His sanctification and be like Himself—saints, consecrated ones, men set apart for God by the sprinkling of the blood. Through the truth, they are sanctified by the power of the Holy Ghost. "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb 10:14); so that the perfection of His saints, both as to the conscience and as to personal holiness, is connected with the one offering and springs out of the one work finished upon Calvary. "By the which will we are sanctified, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb 10:10). Here again the sanctification is connected with the offering of the body of Christ. Whatever

³⁰ **spell** – subject of discourse or discussion.

place “the power of His resurrection” may hold in our spiritual history, it is the cross that is the source of all that varied fullness by which we are justified and purified. The secret of a believer’s holy walk is *his continual recurrence to the blood of the Surety and his daily intercourse with a crucified and risen Lord...*

Want of sensitiveness to the difference between truth and error is one of the evil features of modern Protestantism. Sounding words, well-executed pictures, [and] pretentious logic carry away multitudes. The distinction between Gospel and no Gospel is very decided and very momentous; yet many will come away from a sermon in which the free Gospel has been overlaid, not sensible of the want,³¹ and praising the preacher. The conversions of recent years have not the depth of other days. Consciences are half-awakened and half-pacified; the wound is slightly laid open and slightly healed. Hence, the want of spiritual discernment as to truth and error. The conscience is not sensitive, else it would at once refuse and resent any statement, however well argued or painted, which encroached in the slightest degree upon the free Gospel of God’s love in Christ; which interposed any obstacle between the sinner and the cross; or which merely declaimed about the cross, without telling us especially how it saves and how it purifies.

From *The Everlasting Righteousness*, available as a paperback from Chapel Library.

Horatius Bonar (1808-1889): Scottish Presbyterian minister and prolific author of tracts, books, and hymns. Born in Edinburgh, Scotland.

SAVING FAITH AND GOOD WORKS

Ebenezer Erskine (1680-1754)

FIRST, WHAT BELIEVING IN GOD IMPORTS: It imports the knowledge of God, in a suitableness to the revelation which He hath made of Himself to us, through Christ, in the Gospel. I do own that the very heathens may know His eternal power by the things that are seen. But there is no saving knowledge of God by a guilty sinner, but as He is in Christ: “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2Co 4:6). And whatever fine notions or speculations people may have of God and of His excellencies, as discovered in the works of creation and providence, yet, if their notions of Him be not regulated by the Gospel revelation, and if this revelation of a God in Christ be not opened by the Spirit of wisdom, rending the veil of ignorance and unbelief that is upon the mind by nature, there can be no saving, satisfying, or sanctifying knowledge of God and consequently no true faith or believing... Only a saving illumination of the mind with the knowledge of a God in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, can produce a saving faith. And this knowledge is so essential to faith, or believing, that we find it frequently in Scripture called by the name of *knowledge*: “This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent” (Joh 17:3).

To believe in God implies a firm and steady assent unto the truth and veracity of God speaking in His Word. It is to believe and credit what He says on His own testimony. This is called a “receiving the record of God, a setting to the seal that God is true, a believing of the report of the Gospel.” When the man hears “the word of the truth of the Gospel,” he is ready to cry out with the Apostle, “It is a faithful saying.” This Word is established in the heavens; yea, heaven and earth shall pass away, but this Word of God endureth forever...

I proceed now to inquire what influence this faith hath upon good works:

True faith unites the soul to Christ, Who is the very root and fountain of all holiness. “From me (saith the Lord), is thy fruit found. Except ye abide in me, and I in you,” to wit, by faith, “ye cannot bring forth much fruit.” Indeed, a person in a state of nature may bring forth many fruits that are morally and materially good; but, without union with Christ, we can do no work that is spiritually good and acceptable; for “as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me” (Joh 15:4). We may as well gather grapes off thorns or figs off thistles as expect works that are spiritually good from a person out of Christ . . .

³¹ **not...want** – unaware that something was missing.

Faith works by love, and love is the fulfilling of the Law. Love to God in Christ is the next and immediate fruit of true and saving faith. Now, the heart being oiled with the love of God in Christ, this makes the man to abound in good works: “The love of Christ constraineth us,” says the Apostle (2Co 5:14). Love makes a man to keep God’s commandments. Love will make a man to run through fire and water for Him. “Many waters cannot quench love” (Song 8:7). “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (Rom 8:35).

Faith applies the promises of the New Covenant and fetches grace from thence for obeying the precept of the law. Faith, as it were, travels between the *precept* and the *promise*: it carries the man from the precept unto the promise and from the promise to the precept. As for instance, when the law says, “And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (Deu 6:5; Luk 10:27), faith runs to the promise, where God hath said, “God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God” (Deu 30:6)...Does the law say, “Thou shalt know the Lord?” (Hos 2:20). Well, faith looks to the promise, “I will give them an heart to know me” (Jer 24:7). Does the law oblige us to keep all His commandments? Faith runs to the promise and applies it, “I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes” (Eze 36:27).

Faith hath influence on good works, as it beholds the authority of a God in Christ interposed in every commandment of the Law. The eye of natural reason may see, as was hinted, the authority of a God-creator, as is plain in the case of the heathens; but it is only the eye of that faith, which is of God’s operation, that can behold the authority of a God in Christ and receive the Law out of His hands...O! when a God in Christ is viewed by faith, the soul cannot but cry out, “He is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth: His commandments are not grievous, His yoke is easy, and His burden is light. For I see it no more a covenant of works to me, but a rule of obedience, sweetened with redeeming love and grace.” Thus, you see what influence faith hath upon good works.

From “The Necessity and Profitableness of Good Works Asserted.”

ZEALOUS OF GOOD WORKS

Thomas Manton (1620-1677)

“Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works”—Titus 2:14.

WE should be forward³² and cheerful in well doing. Zeal is “a higher degree of love”: the more love, the more forward in acting. Certainly, zeal will readily set us a-work to do all we do willingly, freely, and cheerfully, as the Apostle intimates, “For I know the forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal hath provoked very many” (2Co 9:2). It is not zeal to stand bucking and disputing every inch with the Spirit of God. You are not only called to the bare practice of good works, *but you must be first and most forward and leaders of others*. Watch [for] opportunities to do good, and take hold of them when they are offered. We should be glad of an opportunity offered, wherein to discover³³ our affection to God and our hatred to sin. This is zeal: to be willing and forward.

2. To be zealous is to be self-denying and resolute notwithstanding discouragements. Zeal is a mixed affection. It consists partly of love and partly of indignation. So when I am zealous of a thing, I love that thing and shake off and hate all that lets³⁴ and hinders it. Zeal sets us a-work and holds us to it notwithstanding discouragements. Zeal will not stick at a little labor and charge;³⁵ the more resistance, the more glory! God’s children are glad that they may not serve God with that which cost them nothing, as David professeth, “Neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing” (2Sa 24:24). Certainly men are not zealous and their hearts are not set upon the ways of God, when every slight excuse will serve the turn, and every little profit draws

³² forward – eager.

³³ discover – reveal; show.

³⁴ lets – obstructs; stands in the way.

³⁵ stick at...labor and charge – hesitate because of hard work or burdens to carry.

them away, and every petty business doth hinder them and break off communion with God, and every slender temptation doth interrupt and break off all their purposes and resolutions to duty and obedience, be it prayer, charity, or acts of righteousness. We must be resolute for “it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing” (Gal 4:18).

3. To be zealous of good works imports diligence and earnestness to advance piety³⁶ to the highest pitch...Is he zealous that is contented with a *little* charity, with a *little* worship only? Sloth and idleness will not stand with zeal: “Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord” (Rom 11:11). Thus, it will be when we are seething hot in spirit...A large affection cannot be contented with mean³⁷ things and low degrees of holiness...Those that are planted into this noble Vine, Jesus Christ, are full of good works.

4. To be zealous of good works is to be constant to the end. The fire on the altar never went out, but it was always maintained and kept in; so we must never let the fire of zeal go out. Zeal is not like fire in *straw*. Alas! Sudden fervors are soon spent...But it is like fire in *wood* that casts a lasting heat: “It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing” (Gal 4:18). Not at first only for a fit or pang,³⁸ that doth not come from sanctification; therefore, you should keep up your fervor. Watch against all decays, especially in age. The motions of youth are very vehement, for youth is full of eager spirits and seems to be all on fire; but many times these motions are not so sincere. But the actions of age are more solid, though many times they [lack] vigor and heat. Therefore, strive to keep up your zeal: “Ye did run well, who did hinder you?” (Gal 5:7). Carnal men, when their first heats are spent, give over:³⁹ they grow cold, careless, and indifferent in matters of religion...

THE RESPECT AND PLACE OF ZEAL IN GOOD WORKS IS A NOTE OF GOD’S PEOPLE AND A FRUIT OF CHRIST’S DEATH:

1. It is a note of God’s people. There is in the new creature a propensity⁴⁰ and inclination to good works. As all creatures are created with an inclination to their proper operations, such a willing tendency is there in the new creature to those actions that are heavenly. As sparks fly upward and a stone moves downward, so the new creature is carried to obedience and holiness from a free principle with-in⁴¹...Good works are a note of the new creature: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Eph 2:10). As an artificer⁴² sets a mark upon his workmanship that he might know it, so God sets a visible mark upon His servants: He doth not make a new creature for old works. Good works are witnesses that you can bring to evidence the truth and power of grace. Luther saith, “Good works are faith incarnate,” that is, faith is manifested by them, as the Son of God was manifested in the flesh. They are witnesses to the world, to yourselves, and unto God that you are His. They are signs and witnesses to the world. This is the badge by which God would have His peculiar children known—not by pomp and worldly splendor, not by any outward excellency, riches, greatness, and estate, but by zeal to good works.

There are no barren trees in Christ’s garden...Our heavenly Father would be glorified in His servants’ bringing forth much fruit: “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples” (Joh 15:8). God standeth much upon His honor. Now it is for the honor of God that all which are planted and grafted into Christ should be full of good works...Look: as in a tree, the sap and life is hid, but the fruit and apples do appear, so zeal of good works is that which appears...It is the difference *between us and hypocrites*: a hypocrite, like a carbuncle,⁴³ seems to be all on a fire; but when you touch it, it is quite cold. So they pretend to religion, talk much, but have no true regular zeal, no spiritual warmth. It is notable our Lord Himself proves His divine original by His works, “Though ye believe not me, believe the works, that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him” (Joh 10:38). So is this the sensible evidence you are in Christ and Christ in you.

Graces are not always evident in feeling, but in fruit; the effects cannot be hid. Then they are signs and evidences to God Himself. The Lord will look upon them as marks and evidences of His people...That the faith of the elect might be found to praise and honor, He will have works produced. Not that God wants evidences of our sincerity, but He will have all the world know we have not been unfruitful. A man that expecteth to be posed⁴⁴ is preparing

³⁶ **piety** – reverence for God, love of His character, and obedience to His will.

³⁷ **mean** – inferior.

³⁸ **fit or pang** – sudden, irregular impulse or sudden, keen emotion.

³⁹ **give over** – give up.

⁴⁰ **propensity** – an tendency or feeling that drives somebody to make a particular choice.

⁴¹ **free principle within** – the principle of life produced by the Holy Spirit in the new birth.

⁴² **artificer** – a skilled craftsman or worker.

⁴³ **carbuncle** – a deep-red garnet; a red gemstone that is smoothly rounded and polished.

⁴⁴ **posed** – examined by questioning; interrogated.

to answer, and would give something to know the questions beforehand. Christ hath told us what are the questions upon which we shall be examined and taxed at the Day of Judgment. He will say, “Have you fed and clothed My people? Have you ministered to their necessities? Have you relieved them with spiritual counsel and admonition? Have you been good, holy, and just?” (cf. Mat 25:31-46). Therefore, let us provide to give an answer that we might not be ashamed at the Last Day. Thus, this zeal for good works hath the place and room of a witness: to *God*, as the rule and measure of His process; to *ourselves*, as the ground of our assurance; and to the *world*, as the great vindication of the honor of our profession.

2. It is a fruit of Christ’s death...Certainly, God hath not been at all this cost and labor for nothing. He did not project the sending of Christ, and Jesus Christ did not so give up Himself in the work of redemption for nothing, but [rather] to inflame us to a great height of piety. They that live at a low rate of holiness cross and disgrace the whole design of the Gospel. They are not apprehensive of the love of God in giving Christ or the love of Christ in giving Himself. Our redemption was carried on in such a way, not only that the comfort, but also the duty of the creature might be raised to the highest.

Partly, again, as Christ hath purchased the gift of the Spirit to fit us for good works, yea, to make us zealous in them: “According to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour” (Tit 3:5, 6). Now the Spirit dwelleth in our hearts to set our graces a-working: “The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (Joh 4:14). So John 7:38, 39: “He that believeth on me, as the scripture saith, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water: this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him shall receive.” The Spirit is not a fountain sealed up, but flowing forth. The Spirit of God is a mighty Spirit and comes in upon the soul not only as a gentle blast, but as a mighty rushing wind! He comes not only in the appearance of a dove, but of cloven tongues of fire (Act 2). He comes as a Spirit of power to quicken and awaken the soul to great heights and fervors in obedience.

Look: as men acted⁴⁵ by Satan (the unclean spirit) are restless in evil and carried headlong as the herd of swine into the sea, so those that are acted by the Spirit of God are much more carried on with great earnestness in the ways of God. The devil hath not such advantages to work upon his instruments as the Spirit of God hath upon us. The devil works and operates in all the children of disobedience: “The spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (Eph 2:2). But the devil cannot work but by man’s consent, neither can he work immediately upon the soul, but only by the senses and by the fancy,⁴⁶ but the Spirit of God can work immediately upon them in whom He acts. Therefore, being acted by Him, they must needs be zealous and earnest; for the Spirit of God “knows no slow motions”... When the Spirit puts forth its force upon the soul, such as are drawn by the Holy Ghost are not in jest, as carnal men are, *but in earnest*. They do not dally with religion, but make it their great business to surprise heaven and carry on constant communion with God: “The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force” (Mat 11:12).

USE 1: *Grace is no enemy to good works.* Libertinism⁴⁷ is ancient and natural. Christ died to improve piety, not to lessen it, but to raise it to the highest, to make us zealous of good works that we might be carried on to heaven with full sails. Therefore, he that grows looser, less watchful against sin, less diligent in the exercise of holiness, less frequent in communion with God, less humble and penitent after committing of sin, offers the greatest abuse to grace that may be and perverts its natural use. There is no freezing by the fire. We may freeze indeed by painted fire: that may make us contract chilliness and drowsiness. *But true grace is a fire that warms and inflames our affections.* Christ came to make us more cheerful and lively, but not slack, careless, and cold...A cold Christian will have but cold comfort. For whom did Christ die? For those that are zealous of good works...It is not cold prayers, yawning devotions, and drowsy wishes when men are half-asleep that will serve in this case. Heaven is gotten by force and surprised by onset and storm.⁴⁸ It signifies breaking through the rail, and all restraints that are set to keep us off from God.

USE 2: *To stir us up to this zeal of good works.* In a dead and drowsy age, we need an alarm. Knowledge hath now devoured practice in these decaying times. Seneca⁴⁹ complains men are altogether studious for filling their brains,

⁴⁵ acted – influenced.

⁴⁶ fancy – delusive imagination.

⁴⁷ Libertinism – the practice of no moral restraint and the rejection of religious authority.

⁴⁸ onset and storm – attack and violent assault.

⁴⁹ Seneca, Lucius Annaeus (c. 4 BC-AD 65) also Seneca the Younger – Roman philosopher, statesman, and orator; Rome’s leading intellectual of his day.

not warming their hearts. And when once men became more learned, they were less good. The world is altogether for storing the head with notions, empty and airy strains; so that if Christ should come amongst us, He would find few zealous, but a company of lazy Christians that live at a low, cheap rate of Christianity. High-flown we are indeed in our fancies, in notions and pretences, but low and flat in practice and conversation. Usually thus it is in the time of the church's prosperity; like a river, it loseth in depth what it gains in breadth. Then it hath many friends, but their love is not so strong nor so hot as at other times... Thus it often falls out with the church of God that, when religion is fair, many take up the profession, but alas! It is but weak and spiritless without any life and vigor... Therefore, let us inquire what kind of enforcements and considerations are likely to be most operative to press us to this zeal and care of good works.

Consider how violent and earnest carnal men are in the ways of sin, and shall they serve Satan better than you serve God? Oh! Consider, you have a better master, better work, and better wages. Their master is the devil; their work is the basest drudgery, being slaves to their own lusts; and their wages are suitable: their reward is everlasting damnation and a separation from the presence of the Lord. How active are wicked men for the kingdom of darkness! How zealous and earnest to ruin themselves, as if they could not be damned soon enough... God bids the prophet look upon this sight (as indeed it is worthy of a Christian consideration): Seest thou what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? "The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead the dough to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto other gods" (Jer 7:17, 18). What a busy diligence is here to promote their false worship! Fathers, children, husbands, wives—they all put their helping hands to the work and find some employment or other. Where will you have a family so earnest and zealous to set up the work of God? Oh! How can you look upon such a spectacle as this without shame, that a lust should have more power with them than the love of God with you?... You have higher motives, nobler employment; your work is the perfection of the creature; the noblest faculties are exercised in the noblest way of operation; your rewards are more excellent; and you have greater advantages and helps. Shall they take more pains to undo their souls than you do to save your souls? We read in ecclesiastical story, when Pambus saw a harlot curiously dressed, he wept, partly to see one take so much pains for her own eternal ruin, and partly because he had not been so careful to please Christ and to dress up his soul for Christ as she was to please her wanton lover. Christians, whenever you are cast upon such a sight or spectacle, when you come by a shop, and see men labor and toiling out their hearts, and all this for temporal gain, doth it not make you blush and be ashamed that you are so negligent and careless in the work of God?

Consider you yourselves have been violent and earnest in the ways of sin: will you not do as much for God? How may every one say, "When I was a wicked and carnal man, I followed it with all my heart, and shall I do less now in a state of grace?" The Apostle hath a notable expression, "I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness" (Rom 6:19). Mark how the Apostle brings it in with a preface, "I speak after the manner of men," that is, men in common sense and reason judge it equal that they should be as diligent to come up to the height of sanctification and as zealous of good works, as ever you were to come up to the height of sin and were zealous for hell. Should you not have as much care to save yourselves as to ruin and damn yourselves? You made haste to do evil, as if you could not be damned soon enough; now, in reason, you should be as zealous for God as [you were] for Satan. Heretofore we could riot away the day and card away the night; and shall not some days be spent in fasting and prayer? Shall every hour be begrudged that is bestowed upon God?... It is an equitable, modest, and just proposal that I make, and with condescension to your infirmities, that you should be as earnest and zealous for God, and to grow in grace, as ever you were zealous to increase your guilt and sin. Formerly, I never ceased until I got to the top, until I was so wicked that I could hardly be more wicked. Why should I not now labor to grow in grace? Can conversion be right when sin had more of our thoughts than ever God had?...

Consider what Christ hath done in purchasing our salvation. It was no play and sport to redeem [sinners]. Christ was not in jest when He yielded up Himself to be tempted, to be persecuted, to be crucified, to be exercised with bitter agonies; and is all this expense and cost for nothing? The temptations of Christ and the sorrows of His cross all show that it is no easy matter to bring a soul to heaven; and, therefore, shall not we be zealous? Carnal and careless Christians do lessen Christ's sufferings interpretatively, as if they were not so great. They trifle and dally, and compliment in religion, and so do not make it so weighty a matter to save their souls: "Ought not Christ to

suffer these things, and to enter into his glory?” (Luk 24:26); and, “Thus it behoved Christ to suffer” (24:46). As matters were laid in God’s decree, nothing else would serve the turn: Christ ought to suffer; it was foreordained.

But you will say, “How do you force this zealously and earnestness for good works out of what Christ hath done! For if He hath done so much, what need we do any more?” I answer—He is gone to heaven as the Captain of our salvation, and we must follow Him in the same way; He is gone to seize upon heaven in our right, but we must force our way thither. Canaan was given to Israel, but they were to take possession by the sword. [Likewise], Caleb was to drive out the giants out of Hebron, though it was given him. So, though heaven be given and Christ hath seized upon it in our right, yet we have our conflicts. Indeed, the power of Satan is broken, his head bruised, yet there are some relics of the battle left for our exercise. Therefore, be earnest, be zealous.

Consider how odious want of zeal is to God. He will not own a cold, careless, neutral spirit: “So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth” (Rev 3:16). Cold, lazy professors, that have nothing but a dead form, are as lukewarm water to the stomach; and there is nothing the stomach nauseates so much as that which is lukewarm. So will God cast them out with much loathing...

Consider how dishonorable it is to the living God to serve Him with a dead heart and cold affections, when He hath indented⁵⁰ with you upon such glorious and noble terms... “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your consciences from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb 9:14). God, that is a living God, must have lively service; but men worship Him as a dead idol... What you do, it must be done with all the heart and all the might. Consider, religion is not a fancy.⁵¹ You do not worship the vanities of the Gentiles; therefore, be not dead, cold, and careless. You worship the living God, and He will be served with life, zeal, and strength of affection.

From Sermon 22 in “Sermons upon Titus 2:11-14” in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton*, Vol. 16, reprinted by Maranatha Publications.

Thomas Manton (1620-1677): Non-Conformist Puritan preacher. James Ussher called him “one of the best preachers in England.” Appointed as one of three clerks at the Westminster Assembly. Born in Lawrence-Lydiat, Somerset, England.

THE NECESSITY OF MAINTAINING GOOD WORKS

Ebenezer Erskine (1680-1754)

“This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men”—Titus 3:8.

THE Apostle foresaw by the Spirit of prophecy that the doctrine of grace would meet with strange opposition in after ages of the world. That opposition was already begun in his own day, as appears from his epistle to the Galatians. [He] therefore ratifies it with the greater solemnity, “This is a faithful saying.” From whence I observe, by the by, that as ministers of Christ are to declare the whole counsel of God, so there are some truths that need to be more vouched⁵² and dwelt upon than others, particularly truths that are more fundamental and most controverted by gainsayers.⁵³ Hence, we find there is sometimes an oyes⁵⁴ or a watchword⁵⁵ added to some truths, requiring our more diligent attention and serious entertainment. Thus, the Apostle here, considering the opposition the doctrine of grace would meet with from men of legal spirits,⁵⁶ adds this word of attention to the close of it: “This is a faithful saying.”

⁵⁰ **indented** – entered into a formal agreement; covenanted.

⁵¹ **fancy** – figment of the imagination.

⁵² **vouched** – declared.

⁵³ **controverted by gainsayers** – argued against by those who disagree and deny.

⁵⁴ **oyes** – “hear ye,” a call for silence and attention when a proclamation is about to be made.

⁵⁵ **watchword** – the call of a sentinel on his rounds.

⁵⁶ **legal spirits** – those who believe in doing works to be right with God.

Ministers are watchmen and set for the defense of the truth. Therefore, when any truth of God is in danger, they are to double their guard and to support these truths that are most attacked by the enemy, so they may not fall in the streets. And if it be the duty of ministers to teach, inculcate, and support those truths that are controverted or contradicted, surely it is also the duty of people to *study* these truths and the arguments that support them. [By this] they may be in a capacity to distinguish between truth and error and to give a reason of the faith and hope that is in them (1Pe 3:15). The Bereans have a high commendation given them.⁵⁷ They are called men of noble and excellent spirits on this account: they would not swallow down by an implicit faith⁵⁸ the doctrines taught even by the Apostles themselves. No, but they tried even the apostolic doctrine by the standard of the Law and Testimony. And this is a thing not only commanded and commended in the Scriptures of truth, but most agreeable likewise to the dictates of right reason. How is it profitable that people can obey the command of “contending for the faith once delivered unto the saints,” if they do not understand the doctrine of faith, particularly these doctrines that are in danger of being wrested from them? Ministers are called “stewards in the house of God” (Tit 1:7) and “stewards of the mysteries of God” (1Co 4:1, 2). Now, you know it is very much the interest of the house or family to see that their steward feed them with sound and wholesome food, otherwise they may come to swallow a stone instead of bread or a scorpion instead of a fish. We call you, Sirs, to examine and try our doctrines at the bar of the Word; and if they will not abide the trial there, let them sink and perish forever. There is always ground to suspect any set of men who decline or shun any fair trial of their doctrines; for “he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God” (Joh 3:21). But,

2. In the words, we have an apostolic command given unto Titus and in him to all ministers of the Gospel: “These things I will that thou affirm constantly.” The word in the original rendered *affirm* is borrowed from the practice of these who, when they buy or sell a thing, do oblige themselves to maintain the claim and title against all law-suits or entanglements. Titus and other ministers are not only to teach the doctrines of the Gospel, but to confirm and make them good against all the cavils⁵⁹ or questions that may be moved about them.

3. In the words, we have a particular doctrine that the Apostle recommends to be taught by Titus, namely, “That they who have believed in God, should be careful to maintain good works.” Notice the foundation of all good works, [which] is believing in God, to wit,⁶⁰ in God as He is manifested in Christ, God reconciling the world to Himself. For out of Christ, He cannot be the object of faith, but of terror to a guilty sinner. Now, this believing in God is the very foundation of all good works: for “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb 11:6); and they that have believed are enjoined to maintain good works. The word in the original is borrowed from the military, particularly such as set themselves on the front of the battle and march forward to encourage the whole army to follow them. “Believers,” would the Apostle say, “must not only do good works, but must be patterns and ensamples thereof to others,” according to that of Christ: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Mat 5:16)...

I COME TO INQUIRE WHAT MAY BE THE IMPORT OF THAT PHRASE OF BEING CAREFUL TO MAINTAIN GOOD WORKS. To this I answer briefly, in the following particulars:

1. It implies a diligent attendance unto the rule of the Word. According to that of David, “Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word” (Psa 119:9), the [young] man makes God’s statutes the men of his counsel. And when he is called to this or that piece of service, he takes advice of his counselors, whether he may do or forbear. They are “a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psa 119:105). As Israel looked to the pillar of cloud and of fire in all their motions and travels for direction through the wilderness, so the gracious soul looks to the Law or Testimony in every step of his way towards the Canaan that is above.

2. It implies an anxiety or solicitude⁶¹ of soul to have his actions managed and ordered according to that rule. It is the very desire of his soul to be found in the Lord’s way, as it was with David, “O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!” (Psa 119:5). He desires not only to have his outward walk, but the inward frame of his very soul—all the thoughts of it—molded in an agreeableness unto the Law of God: “Let my heart be found in thy statutes; that I be not ashamed” (Psa 119:80). Such is his concern for this that he lays up the Law of God in the

⁵⁷ Acts 17:10, 11.

⁵⁸ **implicit faith** – faith that one does not arrive at independently, but by resting on the authority of another without raising questions.

⁵⁹ **cavils** – trivial objections.

⁶⁰ **to wit** – namely; that is to say.

⁶¹ **solicitude** – a feeling of excessive concern.

very cabinet of his heart as an antidote against sin: “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psa 119: 11).

3. It implies a holy watchfulness against all the temptations, motions, or occasions of sin in thought, word, or action: “I said, I will take heed to my ways,” says David (Psa 39:1). The man sets a watch over his heart according to that command, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Pro 4:23). He sets a watch over his eyes and makes a covenant with them and over his lips, lest sin should either enter or go forth by that door.

4. It implies an embracing of every opportunity for doing of good works that God puts into his hands and improving the same. When God puts the opportunity or talent in his hand, he studies to lay it out for the Master’s use and his own and others’ profit and advantage, according to that of Solomon: “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might” (Ecc 9:10).

5. It implies a going on or a progress in the duties of obedience without returning to the old trade of sin. The Christian is not like the dog returning to his vomit or the sow that was washed to wallow in the mire. No, but the righteous holdeth on his way: he maintains good works; he waxes stronger and stronger; he forgets things that are behind and reacheth forth unto things that are before (Phi 3:13).

6. The word here, as I hinted in the explication, implies an exciting or influencing of others to the study of good works. The word, as I said, is borrowed from captains or commanders that go in the front of the battle, encouraging the soldiers of the army to follow their example. The believer studies to cast a good copy and to recommend holiness and good works unto others by his practice, so as others, seeing his good works, may be encouraged to do the like.

7. Lastly, this maintaining of good works must needs take in a doing of all by faith and improving the strength of Christ:⁶² “I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD: I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only” (Psa 71:16).

From “The Necessity and Profitableness of Good Works Asserted,” in
The Whole Works of the Late Rev. Ebenezer Erskine, Vol. 1, reprinted
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Ebenezer Erskine (1680-1754): Evangelical Scottish preacher, chief founder of the Secession Church of Scotland (formed by dissenters from the Church of Scotland); father of fifteen children; born in Dryburgh, Berwickshire, Scotland.

“By obedience to the commands of God, we evidence the sincerity of our holy profession. By this our faith is declared genuine before men...Whoever pretends to believe in Jesus and is not habitually careful to perform good works, his faith is worthless, barren, dead. By a good conversation, in which our light shines before men, we edify our brethren, silence opposers, and preserve the Gospel from those reproaches which would otherwise be cast upon it, as if it were a licentious doctrine.”—*Abraham Booth*

THE BEST WAY TO PROVOKE GOOD WORKS

John Bunyan (1628-1688)

“That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men”—Titus 3:7, 8.

THE best way both to provoke others and ourselves to good works is to be often affirming to others the doctrine of justification by grace and to believe it ourselves. “This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good works” (Tit 3:8)...I tell you that the best way to be fruitful in them is to be much in the exercise of the doctrine of justification by grace. And

⁶² **improving...Christ** – making better use of the strength Christ gives.

they both agree: for as faith animates to good works, so the doctrine of grace animates faith. Wherefore, the way to be rich in good works is to be rich in faith; and the way to be rich in faith is to be conscientiously affirming the doctrine of grace to others and believing it ourselves.

FIRST, TO BE CONSTANTLY AFFIRMING IT TO OTHERS: Thus, Paul tells Timothy that if he puts the brethren in mind of the truths of the Gospel, he himself should not only be a good minister of Christ, but should be nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine (1Ti 4:6). It is the ordinance of God that Christians should be often asserting the things of God each to others and that by their so doing they should edify one another (Heb 10:24, 25; 1Th 5:11).

The doctrine of the Gospel is like the dew and the small rain that distilleth upon the tender grass, wherewith it doth flourish and is kept green (Deu 32:2). Christians are like the several flowers in a garden that have upon each of them the dew of heaven, which being shaken with the wind, they let fall their dew at each other's roots, whereby they are jointly nourished and become nourishers of one another. For Christians to commune savourly⁶³ of God's matters one with another is as if they opened to each other's nostrils boxes of perfume. Saith Paul to the church at Rome, "For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me" (Rom 1:11, 12). Christians should be often affirming the doctrine of grace and justification by it one to another.

SECOND, AS THEY SHOULD BE THUS DOING, SO THEY SHOULD LIVE IN THE POWER OF IT THEMSELVES. They should by faith suck and drink in this doctrine as the good ground receiveth the rain, which being done, forthwith there is proclaimed good works. Paul to the Colossians saith thus, "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth." But how long ago? Why, "since the day ye heard it," [saith he,] "and knew the grace of God in truth" (Col 1:3-6).

Apples and flowers are not made by the gardener, but are an effect of the planting and watering. Plant in the sinner good doctrine, and let it be watered with the word of grace, and as the effect of that, there [are] the fruits of holiness and the end everlasting life (Rom 6:22). *Good doctrine is the doctrine of the Gospel*, which showeth to men that God clotheth them with the righteousness of His Son freely and maketh Him with all His benefits over to them, by which free gift the sinner is [declared] righteous before God. And because he is so, therefore, there is infused a principle of grace into the heart, whereby it is both quickened and bringing forth fruit (Rom 3:21-26; 1Co 1:30; 2Co 5:21; Joh 1:16).

Now then, seeing good works do flow from faith and seeing faith is nourished by an affirming of the doctrine of the Gospel, take here these few considerations from the doctrine of the Gospel for the support of thy faith, that thou mayest be indeed fruitful and rich in good works.

Consider 1: The whole Bible was given for this very end: that thou shouldest both believe this doctrine and live in the comfort and sweetness of it. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom 15:4; Joh 20:31).

Consider 2: That therefore every promise in the Bible is thine to strengthen, quicken, and encourage thy heart in believing.

Consider 3: That there is nothing that thou dost [that] can so please God as believing: "The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy" (Psa 147:11). They please Him because they embrace His righteousness, etc.

Consider 4: That all the withdrawals of God from thee are not for the weakening, but for the trial of thy faith; and also that whatever He suffers Satan or thy own heart to do is not to weaken faith (Job 23:8-10; 1Pe 1:7).

Consider 5: That *believing* is that which will keep in thy view the things of heaven and glory and that at which the devil will be discouraged, sin weakened, and thy heart quickened and sweetened (Heb 11:27; Jam 4:7; 1Pe 5:9; Eph 6:16; Rom 15:13).

⁶³ *savourly* – with understanding; with appreciation.

Consider lastly: By believing, the lover of God is kept with warmth upon the heart; and this will provoke thee continually to bless God for Christ, for grace, for faith, hope, and all these things, either in God or thee that doth accompany salvation (2Co 2:14; Psa 103:1-3).

THIRD, THE DOCTRINE OF THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS RECEIVED BY FAITH WILL MAKE NOTABLE WORK IN THE HEART OF A SINNER TO BRING FORTH GOOD WORKS. But, forasmuch as there is a body of death and sin in every one that hath the grace of God in this world, and because this body of death will be ever opposing that which is good, as the Apostle saith (Rom 7:21), therefore take these few particulars further for the suppressing that which will hinder a fruitful life.

1. Keep a continual watch over the wretchedness of thy own heart, not to be discouraged at the sight of thy vileness, but to prevent its wickedness. That will labor either to hinder thee from doing good works or else will hinder thee in the doing thereof. For evil is present with thee for both these purposes. Take heed then, that thou do not listen to that at any time, but deny, though with much struggling, the workings of sin to the contrary.

2. Let this be continually before thy heart: God's eye is upon thee and seeth every secret turning of thy heart, either to or from Him. "All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb 4:13).

3. If thou deny to do that good which thou oughtest with what thy God hath given thee, then consider that though He love thy soul, yet He can chastise: First, thy inward man with such troubles that thy life shall be restless and comfortless. Secondly, and can also so blow upon thy outward man that all thou gettest shall be put in a bag with holes (Psa 89:31-33; Hag 1:6). And set the case⁶⁴ He should license⁶⁵ but one thief among thy substance or one spark of fire among thy barns, how quickly might that be spent ill and against thy will, which thou shouldest have spent to God's glory and with thy will. And I tell thee further, that if thou want a heart to do good when thou hast about thee, thou mayest want⁶⁶ comfort in such things thyself from others, when thine is taken from thee (see Jud 1:6, 7).

4. Consider that a life full of good works is the only way on thy part to answer the mercy of God extended to thee: God hath had mercy on thee and hath saved thee from all thy distresses. God hath not stuck⁶⁷ to give thee His Son, His Spirit, and the kingdom of heaven. Saith Paul, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom 12:1; Mat 18:32, 33).

5. Consider that this is the way to convince all men that the power of God's things hath taken hold of thy heart. I speak to them that hold the head⁶⁸—and say what thou wilt—if thy faith be not accompanied with a holy life, thou shalt be judged a withered branch, a wording professor,⁶⁹ salt without savor, and as lifeless as a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal (Joh 15; Mat 13; 1Co 13:1, 2). For, say they, show us your faith by your works, for we cannot see your hearts (Jam 2:18). But I say on the contrary, if thou walk as becomes thee who art saved by grace, then thou wilt witness in every man's conscience that thou art a good tree, now thou leavest guilt on the heart of the wicked (1Sa 24:16, 17). Now thou takest off occasion from them that desire occasion; and now thou art clear from the blood of all men (2Co 11:12; Act 20:26, 31-35). This is the man also that provoketh others to good works. The ear that heareth such a man shall bless him, and the eye that seeth him shall bear witness to him. "Surely," saith David, "he shall not be moved for ever: the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance" (Psa 112:6; Heb 10:24; Job 29:11).

6. Again, the heart that is fullest of good works hath in it the least room for Satan's temptations. And this is the meaning of Peter, where he saith, "Be sober, be vigilant," that is, be busying thyself in faith and holiness, "because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1Pe 5:8). He that walketh uprightly, walketh safely. And they that add to faith, "virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to

⁶⁴ set the case – suppose.

⁶⁵ license – permit.

⁶⁶ want – lack.

⁶⁷ stuck – hesitated.

⁶⁸ hold the head – to make a very prominent profession of religion.

⁶⁹ wording professor – one who professes Christ, but speaks only empty words.

brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2Pe 1:5-10; Pro 10:9).

7. The man who is fullest of good works is fittest to live and fittest to die: “I am now,” at any time, “ready to be offered,” saith fruitful Paul (2Ti 4:6). Whereas he that is barren is neither fit to live, nor fit to die: to die, he himself is convinced he is not fit, and to live, God Himself saith he is not fit: “Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?” (Luk 8:7).

Lastly, consider, to provoke thee to good works, thou shalt have of God when thou comest to glory a reward for everything thou dost for Him on earth. Little do the people of God consider how richly God will reward, what from a right principle and to a right end, is done for Him here. Not a bit of bread to the poor, not a draught of water to the meanest of them that belong to Christ, or the loss of a hair of your head shall in that Day go without its reward (Luk 14:13, 14; Mat 10:42). “For our light affliction,” and so all other pieces of self-denial, “which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2Co 4:17). I tell thee, Christian, be but rich in good works, and thou shalt have more than salvation. Thy salvation thou hast freely by grace through Christ without works (Eph 2:8-10), but now being justified and saved, and as the fruits hereof, renewed by the Holy Ghost. After this, I say, thou shalt be rewarded for every work that proved good.

From “Christian Behavior” in *The Works of John Bunyan, Vol. II*, reprinted by
The Banner of Truth Trust.

John Bunyan (1628-1688): English minister, preacher, and one of the most influential writers of the 17th century. Beloved author of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, *The Holy War*, *The Acceptable Sacrifice*, and numerous others. Born at Elstow near Bedford, England.

JUDGMENT AND THE SAINTS’ REWARD

John Bunyan (1628-1688)

“There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust”—Acts 24:15.

NOW when the saints are raised, as ye have heard, they must give an account of all things, in general, that they have done while they were in the world; of all things, I say, whether they be good or bad...Now here shall all things be reckoned up, from the very first good thing that was done by Adam or Abel, to the last that will fall out to be done in the world...

First, here will be a recompense for all that have sincerely labored in the Word and doctrine—I say, a recompense for all the souls they have saved by their word and watered by the same. Now shall Paul the planter, and Apollos the waterer, with every one of their companions, receive the reward that is according to their works (1Co 3:6–8).

Now, all the preaching, praying, watching, and labor thou hast been at, in thy endeavoring to catch men from Satan to God, shall be rewarded with spangling⁷⁰ glory. Not a soul thou hast converted to the Lord Jesus, nor a soul thou hast comforted, strengthened, or helped by thy wholesome counsel, admonition, and comfortable speech, but it shall stick as a pearl in that crown “which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day” (2Ti 4:7, 8). That is, if thou dost it willingly, delighting to lift up the name of God among men; if thou doest it with love, longing after the salvation of sinners; otherwise thou wilt have only thy labor for thy pains and no more. “For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the Gospel is committed unto me” (1Co 9:17; Phi 1:15). But, I say, if thou do it graciously, then a reward followeth: “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye,” saith Paul, “in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy” (1Th 2:19, 20). Let him, therefore, that Christ hath put into His harvest, take comfort in the midst of all his sorrow and know that God acknowledgeth that “he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (Jam 5:20). Wherefore, labor to convert,

⁷⁰ **spangling** – sparkling; glistening.

labor to water, labor to build up, and to “feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind...And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1Pe 5:2, 4).

Secondly, and as the ministers of Christ’s Gospel shall at this day be recompensed, so shall also those more private saints. [They shall] be with tender affections and love looked on and rewarded for all their work and labor of love, which they have showed to the name of Christ in ministering to His saints and suffering for His sake (Heb 6:10). “Whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free” (Eph 6:8). Ah! Little do the people of God think how largely and thoroughly God will at that day own and recompense all the good and holy acts of His people. Every bit, every drop, every rag, and every night’s harbor, though but in a wisp of straw, shall be rewarded in that day before men and angels. “Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you,” saith Christ, “he shall in no wise lose his [*a disciple’s*] reward” (Mat 10:42). Therefore, “When thou makest a feast,” saith He, “call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just” (Luk 14:13, 14). If there be any repentance among the godly at this day, it will be because the Lord Jesus, in His person, members, and word, was no more owned, honored, entertained, and provided for by them when they were in this world. For it will be ravishing to all to see what notice the Lord Jesus will then take of every widow’s mite. He, I say, will call to mind even all those acts of mercy and kindness that thou hast showed to Him when thou wast among men. I say, He will remember, cry up, and proclaim before angels and saints those very acts of thine that thou hast either forgotten or through bashfulness wilt not at that day count worth the owing. He will reckon them up so fast and so fully that thou wilt cry, “Lord, when did I do this? And when did I do the other? Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? Or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? Or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?” And the King shall answer and say unto them, “Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me...I felt the nourishment of thy food and the warmth of thy fleece. I remember thy loving and holy visits when my poor members were sick, and in prison, and the like. When they were strangers, and wanderers in the world, thou tookest them in. Well done, thou good and faithful servant...Enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (*cf.* Mat 25:21–23, 34–47).

Thirdly, here also will be a reward for all that hardness and Christian enduring of affliction that thou hast met with for thy Lord while thou wast in the world. Here now will Christ begin from the greatest suffering, even to the least, and bestow a reward on them all: from the blood of the suffering saint to the loss of a hair. Nothing shall go unrewarded (Heb 11:36–40; 2Co 8:8–14). “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2Co 4:17). Behold by the Scriptures how God hath recorded the sufferings of His people and also how He hath promised to reward them—“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake” (Mat 5:11, 12; Luk 6:22, 23). “And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life” (Mat 19:29).

Fourthly, there is also a reward at this day for all the more secret and more retired works of Christianity. a. There is not now one act of faith in thy soul, either upon Christ, or against the Devil and Antichrist, but it shall in this day be found out and praised, honored, and glorified in the face of heaven (1Pe 1:7). b. There is not one groan to God in secret against thy own lusts; and for more grace, light, spirit, sanctification, and strength to go through this world like a Christian, but it shall even at the coming of Christ be rewarded openly (Mat 6:6). c. There hath not one tear dropped from thy tender eye against thy lusts, the love of this world, or for more communion with Jesus Christ, but as it is now in the bottle of God; so then it shall bring forth such plenty of reward that it shall return upon thee with abundance of increase. “Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh” (Luk 6:21). “Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?” (Psa 56:8). “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy” (Psa 126:5, 6)...

It remains that I now in few words show you something also of that with which they shall be rewarded.

First then, those that shall be found in the day of their resurrection... They, I say, that then shall be found the people most laborious for God while here, shall at that day enjoy the greatest portion of God or shall be possessed with most of the glory of the Godhead then. For that is the portion of saints in general (Rom 8:17; Lam 3:24). And

why shall he that doth most for God in this world enjoy most of Him in that which is to come? Because by doing and acting, the heart and every faculty of the soul is enlarged and more capacitated, whereby more room is made for glory. Every vessel of glory shall at that day be full of it. But everyone will not be capable to contain a like measure. If they should have it communicated to them, [they] would not be able to stand under it. For there is “an eternal weight in the glory” that saints shall then enjoy (2Co 4:17), and every vessel must be at that day filled—that is, have its heavenly load of it.

All Christians have not the same enjoyment of God in this life, neither indeed were they able to bear it if they had it (1Co 3:2). But those Christians that are most laborious for God in this world, they have already most of Him in their souls. [This is] not only because diligence in God’s ways is the means whereby God communicates Himself; but also because thereby the senses are made more strong and able by reason of use to understand God and to discern both good and evil (Heb 5:13, 14)...Lay up for yourselves a good foundation against the time to come that you may lay hold on eternal life (1Ti 6:19), which eternal life is not the matter of our justification from sin in the sight of God. For that is done freely by grace through faith in Christ’s blood (but here the Apostle speaks of giving of alms). But it is the same that in the other place he calls “the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” And hence it is that he, in his stirring them up to be diligent in good works, doth tell them that he doth not exhort them to it because he wanted, but because he would have “fruit that might abound to their account” (Phi 4:17); as he saith also in another place, “Beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1Co 15:58). Therefore I say, the reward that the saints shall have at this Day for all the good they have done is the enjoyment of God according to their works, though they shall be freely justified and glorified without works.

From “The Resurrection of the Dead and Eternal Judgment,” in *The Works of John Bunyan, Vol. II*, reprinted by The Banner of Truth Trust.

