

## SABBATH THOUGHT 2022-12-24—WHAT ARE GOOD WORKS?

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

God's agape love in us is the motivation for good works. Good works are mentioned quite often in the Bible. There is a very good reason for this—they are required for salvation. While Scripture is plain that faith is required for salvation<sup>1</sup>, it also reveals that, without good works, faith is dead<sup>2</sup>. A few other Scriptures that establish good works as salvational include Ecclesiastes 12:14, Matthew 19:16-21, 2 Corinthians 5:10; and, of course, the parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25:31-46. We are also rewarded in the Kingdom according to our works<sup>3</sup>:

COLOSSIANS 3:8, 24 Watch out for yourselves in order that we may not lose the things we have accomplished, but *that* we may receive a full reward. ... 24 Knowing that you shall receive from *the* Lord the recompense [*reward*] of the inheritance, for you are serving Christ the Lord.

The importance of good works is a mainstay in chapters 2-3 of Revelation where Jesus Christ evaluated every single church—Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea—by their works! Obviously, many did not please Jesus; although, a few were/are acceptable. So, just what are good works? Perhaps our thoughts turn to these verses:

1 CORINTHIANS 12:27-30 Now you are *the* body of Christ, and *you are all* individual members. 28 And God Himself has placed certain *ones* in the church: first, apostles; secondly, prophets; thirdly, teachers; then miracles; then gifts of healings; helps; governments; various languages. 29 *Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all perform miracles?* 30 Do all have **gifts** of healing? Do all speak in *different* languages? Do all interpret?

Notice that none of these are positions established by an ordination. Even the title Apostle is cannot be established by an ordination. The apostles were only those who had personally witnessed the resurrection of Jesus Christ and appointed by Him. In other words, all of these titles and positions are GIFTS given by God the Father and Jesus Christ, not by the laying on of hands.

How many of us have even one of these gifts? So, if these gifts are not common, then what does God expect of the rest of us in the way of good works? In fact, how can we know that we have the means to DO good works? Notice:

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 2:8.

<sup>2</sup> Jas 2:26.

<sup>3</sup> Also 1 Cor. 3:8, 13-15.

GALATIANS 3:5 Therefore *consider this*: **He Who is supplying the Spirit to you, and Who is working deeds of power among you ...**

Do you have God's Holy Spirit dwelling within you? If you have the Holy Spirit, then you have the means to do good works. It is as simple as that. But again, what exactly are good works? In contrast, James defined dead works when talking about faith: "Now then, if there be a brother or sister who is naked and destitute of daily food, And one of you says to them, "Go in peace; be warmed and be filled," and **does not give to them the things necessary for the body**, what good is it? In the same way also, faith, if it does not have works, is dead, by itself." (Jas. 2:15-17). From this, maybe we can formulate a definition:

DEFINITION: A good work is providing for someone in their time of need.

The Bible has a number of examples such as the parable of the good Samaritan<sup>4</sup> and the woman who anointed the feet of Jesus with ointment and wiped them with her hair:

LUKE 7:44-46 And after turning to the woman, He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house, and you did not provide *any water to wash My feet*; but she has washed My feet with *her tears* and wiped *them* with the hairs of her head. 45 You did not give Me a kiss; but she, from the *time* I came in, has not ceased to ardently kiss My feet. 46 You did not anoint My head with oil; but she has anointed My feet with ointment.

Paul gives us two more examples of good works that help us understand them. Notice the first one:

EPHESIANS 4:28 Let the one who stole, steal no more; rather, let him labor with *his hands*, working *at what is good*, **so that he may impart something to the one who has need**.

He describes someone performing physical work that provides for others in need. While it could be the result of earning an income, I think that Tabitha is an example of this in another way:

ACTS 9:36, 39 Now *there was* in Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha; which, being interpreted, is called Dorcas. **She was full of good works and of alms** that she did. ... 39 Then Peter arose *and went with them*; *and when he arrived*, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood around him, weeping and showing *him* **the tunics and garments that Dorcas had made** while she was with them.

Tabitha was laboring to make clothes and directly supply them to those in need. Whether is it working at a job to earn an income from which we have monetary means to help or

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 10:30-37.

using our talents directly, good works can come from our labors. Although the former is a category that is most often attributed to men, it also does not exclude women.

However, that is not something everyone is capable of doing, especially as we age and our strength wanes. Perhaps that is what Paul had in mind in Ephesians 4 because he his next example describes speaking good words to those who are in need of edification (being taught or lifted up):

EPHESIANS 4:29 Do not let any corrupt communication come out of your mouth, but **that which is good and needful for edification that it may give grace to those who hear.**

*Grace* is an undeserved gift that we receive. Speaking can bring grace to others through words that benefit others. They can be words of wisdom, understanding, encouragement, or vision.

But what about those who are alone and isolated? While telephones are ubiquitous, they are useless if we do not have someone to call. This is situation that has not been considered very often, but we do good works by connecting people with one another—those who can supply with those in need. Do you know of anyone in need of talking with someone, prayers, or fasting? Do you also know of someone who has the time and desire to talk, pray, and fast for others? This describes the widow Anna, the prophetess:

LUKE 2:37 And she was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, **serving day and night with fastings and supplications.**

She obviously was of an age where she did not have the strength to labor and provide for others in physical ways. Instead, she did good works that Jesus Christ made certain that mentioned in the Bible for all generations to read about. Was she fasting and praying for people she knew? I like to think so. Paul also emphasized how important these good works are to God:

1 TIMOTHY 5:5 Now **she who is a widow** indeed, and **who is alone in the world,** has *her* hope in God, and **continues in supplications and prayers** night and day.

Good works are the result of agape love, as I said in the beginning. Even though 2 Corinthians 9 is most often used to talk about offerings, notice in verse 8 that it also applies to good works:

2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-15 But this *I* say: the one who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and **the one who sows bountifully [abundant in good works]** shall also reap bountifully. 7 Each one **as he purposes [to do good works] in his heart, so let him give,** but not grudgingly or by compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 For God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you so that in every way you may always have sufficiency in all *things,* and **may abound unto**

**every good work**, 9 According as it is written: “He has scattered abroad, *and* he has given to the poor; his righteousness remains forever.” 10 **Now may He** Who supplies seed to the sower, and bread to eat, **supply your seed and multiply your sowing [good works]; and may He increase the fruits [good works]** of your righteousness, 11 *So that you may* in every way be enriched unto all bountifulness [*abundance for good works*], which causes thanksgiving to God through us. 12 For **the administration of this service is not only filling to overflowing the deficiencies of the saints**, but *is* also abounding by the giving of many thanks to God. 13 Through the performance of this service, *they* are glorifying God for your professed subjection to the gospel of Christ, and **for the liberality of the distribution toward them and toward all the saints**; 14 And in their supplications for you, *there is* a longing on your behalf, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. 15 Now thanks *be* to God for His indescribable free gift.

Good works are not limited by physical strength, age, or learning. God gives gifts to each one of His chosen children and He will ensure that each has an abundance from which to supply the needs of others. This is required of all who are a part of the Body of Christ<sup>5</sup> so He will not omit anyone who seeks opportunities to help others in need.

One final note. Good works require a giver and a receiver. In this life, sometimes we are a giver and other times we are the ones in need. Paul admitted he was both at times:

PHILIPPIANS 4:10-12 But I rejoiced greatly in *the* Lord, that at last *your* care for me has revived—although you were already thinking *of me*, but you lacked an opportunity *to provide*. 11 I am not saying *this* in respect to **being destitute**; for I have learned *that* in whatever *circumstances* I am, **to be content**. 12 **For I have experienced being brought low, and I have experienced abounding**. In everything and in all things I have been taught **both to be full and to hunger**, both **to abound and to be without**.

Notice in verse 10 that the Philippians were able to help Paul with his needs but they were initially prevented from doing so by circumstances. Eventually, God gave them the means. This, too, can happen to us. But in all cases, God supplies both the giver and the receiver—we just need to pray for opportunities to give and pray for our needs. Let God’s agape love in us be established by faith and be desirous of good works for each other!

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

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<sup>5</sup> Eph. 4:6-8, 11-12, 15-16.