

Devoted To Good Works

Titus 3:1-11

Oct. 3, 2021

There is a way to misread the imperatives that are found within the Bible.

There is a way to read the Bible and think that my conformity to the rules is how I gain God's favour.

This is a great mistake—and a far too common one.

It is true that the Bible contains many imperatives.

And it is true that our conformity to these imperatives is important.

Look at how often, for example—just in this letter—we are urged to do **good works** and to live in particular ways.

In 2:7 Paul exhorts us, "**Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works**".

In 2:14 Paul urges us to be a people who are “**zealous for good works**”.

In 3:2 Paul says the Christian should “**be ready for every good work**”.

In 3:8 Paul declares that Christians need to “**be careful to devote themselves to good works**”.

And, as Paul closes out his letter in 3:14, he says again “**let our people learn to devote themselves to good works**”.

If we then pause and ask ourselves, “How should Christians be marked?” the immediate and obvious answer is:

“We are to be marked by ***good works***”.

We are to **be ready** for good works, we are to be **models of** good works, we are to be **zealous** for good works, we are to be **devoted** to good works, and so on.

Because good works are of central importance, we sometimes get tripped up with *the place of good works*.

Paul must have been sensitive to the possibility of the Christians in Crete misunderstanding the purpose of good works.

Paul must have observed persons who were exerting themselves in good works with a view of earning God's favour.

And so what you have in Titus 3:4-7 is a single sentence that describes the nature and basis of our salvation.

Paul declares: **“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”**

In a letter where Paul is urging us to **good works** at every turn, he also says very clearly: “**he saved us, not because of works done by us**” (3:5).

“He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy”.

Our salvation is fundamentally rooted in the character of God and is not rooted in our performance—or even our potential for a good performance.

Our salvation is according to His mercy and is applied by “**the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit**” (3:5).

Accordingly, if someone asks you, “On what basis are you saved?” what is your answer?

If someone asks you, “On what basis are you going to heaven?” and if your answer begins with the first person “I”, then I’m afraid you do not yet understand how salvation works.

When you are asked, “On what basis am I saved?” the answer must begin with the third person—“Because *He*”.

As the prophet Jonah declares, “**Salvation belongs to the Lord!**” (Jon. 2:9).

What’s the basis of my salvation?

I am saved because God the Father elected me in eternity, before I was even born (Eph. 1:4; Tit. 1:1).

I am saved because God the Son died for me as my Substitute, according to His mercy (Tit. 2:14; 3:5).

I am saved because God the Holy Spirit regenerated me—taking out my heart of stone and giving me new affections and new inclinations (Ezek. 36:26; 3:5).

I am saved *because He...*

Before I can point to any decision to believe on my part, I must first point to the comprehensive work of the Triune God.

We must declare with the hymn writer:

*Not the labours of my hands can fulfill Thy laws demands
Could my zeal no respite know, could my tears forever flow
All for sin could not atone; Thou must save, and Thou alone.*

We are reminded in Paul's letter to Titus that *good works are not the ground* of our salvation—*good works are not the cause* of our salvation...

But rather, *good works are the outcome*—*good works are the evidence* of our having been redeemed.

Good works are the God-ordained overflow of being redeemed.

Moreover, good works are included among the purposes of God in saving us.

In his letter to the Ephesians, on the heels of declaring we are saved by grace through faith, and not as a result of works (Eph. 2:8-9), Paul exclaims, “**we are His workmanship, created in Christ**

Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

To Titus, Paul declares the same saying, **“(Jesus) gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works”** (2:14).

And then Paul reframes the same message in the 3rd chapter of Titus, giving it particular emphasis...

Paul writes, **“The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works”** (3:8).

There are some who resist the biblical teaching that **“Salvation belongs to the Lord”** saying that it portrays us as robots.

But this is a straw-man argument.

If our devotion to good works were automatic, why would Paul tell Titus of the need to **“insist on these things”**?

If the compliance of a Christian is robotic, Paul's emphasis on good works is needless.

Clearly, for persons whom Christ has redeemed, there remains a choice about the degree to which we will obey God's commands and conform our behaviour to Christ.

Far from being automatic, Paul says there is a need to "**be careful to devote (ourselves) to good works**" (3:8).

Throughout this letter Paul has provided a myriad of exhortations and warnings to guide our behaviour.

We need not guess about which behaviours honour Christ and which behaviours dishonour Christ—a great many are listed here.

But what I pray is your take home today is the notion that we do not engage in good works in order to gain God's favour.

We engage in good works because we have already received God's favour.

We engage in good works in order to thank and honor the One **“who gave Himself for us”** (2:14) and made us **“heirs”** to His kingdom (3:7).

If Christ has redeemed you, you are a member of His family.

If you are **“in Christ”** you have transitioned from being God’s enemy (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21) to being His son/daughter (Rom. 8:14).

And now, as sons and daughters of Christ, our behaviour reflects back on Christ.

Think of those times when you have met a young person who impresses you with their kind words and their good manners.

Whenever this happens I find myself thinking, “I wonder what his/her parents are like? I would like to meet those who have raised this fine young person.”

And, as parents, we have a keen understanding of how our children's behaviour reflects back upon us.

Similarly, *for better or for worse, God has ordained for the world to see Jesus reflected through us.*

This helps us to focus our minds on the kinds of good works that we engage in.

You see, there is a way to engage in good works where we end up looking good.

There is a manner of serving others, which brings credit to, and attention upon, us.

We must not seek to make ourselves look good, but we aim to point to Christ and His glory.

Charles Spurgeon summarizes our duty when he says, "The true messenger calls upon men, to see Jesus."

Allow me to repeat an illustration that I am fond of...

Many of you know that I was born and raised in Niagara Falls, Canada.

I was blessed to live in such close proximity to this majestic natural beauty.

I was a young child when the city resolved to spend a large sum of money on lighting so that tourists could see the Falls at night.

This investment provided a massive boost for tourism in that tourists could come at just about any time of the day and have a wonderful view of the Falls.

It is now estimated that nearly 12 million tourists visit Niagara Falls each year.

The installation of strategic lighting led directly to a massive increase in the number of tourists.

But do you think there was a single tourist who came to Niagara Falls to see the lights?

No!

The millions came to see what the lights pointed to.

Similarly, our task as Christians is a simple one:

We point to Christ.

We live in a manner that allows others see Christ.

This is why Paul places such an emphasis on good works.

We're not trying to gain God's approval!

We've been called out of darkness and into His marvelous light, and we are charged with shining the light so that the world will see Christ.

It's not about us.

It's all about Him.

We shine for Him.

We're zealous for His name.

Devote yourselves accordingly.

Devote yourselves to good works in Jesus' name. Amen.