

WHAT GOOD IS GOOD DOCTRINE

What Good Are Good Works?

TEXT: Ephesians 2:8-10

Last week we saw how clearly the Scripture tells us that salvation comes to us as a gift by the grace of God which we receive in faith, trusting Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. We cannot gain this salvation by works, no matter how long or hard we try. As we read in the easy to understand passage in Ephesians,

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

The most critical question in life is “What must I do to be saved?” Receiving salvation by faith and earning salvation through doing good works are opposite answers to this question, therefore we have often thought of faith and works as enemies, one fighting the other.

But that is not how the Scripture speaks of faith and good works. They are certainly not the same, but they are more like brothers. They have their differences, but they are part of the same family.

My purpose in this message today is to help you see more clearly the roles that both faith and good works play in our lives and the importance of each. To do that, I went back to the Scriptures to re-study some of the key passages about both faith and works. I then tried to summarize each passage in a sentence that would compare and contrast the two.

The Scriptures led me to six sentences. Don't worry, since we have two services, I can't really go overtime anymore! We will only spend a few minutes on each.

Let me begin by reading Ephesians 2:8-9 again but add verse 10, and I will offer you the first comparison of the brothers named Faith and Works.

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

#1 We receive eternal life by faith,

but we fulfill our eternal purpose by good works.

We are saved by grace because of Christ's death for our sins, applied specifically to each of our accounts through our faith in Jesus. We receive eternal life by faith.

But folks, God's complete purpose for us is not just for us to be saved and to live with Him forever. God does want that for each of us, but He wants more than that. We will

see more clearly in another passage what else it is that God wants, but in this passage we already see that it is not accomplished without good works. We were created for good works. God prepared those works before we were created so that we should walk in them, so we should do them!

Got it? We receive eternal life by faith, but we fulfill our eternal purpose by good works.

Passage number two: **James 2:15-18 NKJV** 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit? 17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 18 But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

#2 Genuine faith always produces salvation,

but genuine salvation always produces good works.

Genuine faith is not just words. It is not even just a conviction that something is true. The devil knows that Jesus is the Son of God who died for sin on a cross and rose from the dead, but he does not have faith. He has not trusted in Jesus as Savior or as Lord.

When we truly trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior, we are surrendering control of our life to Him. That act of surrender to Jesus as our Lord and Master begins to produce good works in our lives. It is not the works produced that save us. Faith in Jesus saved us, but salvation quickly began to produce good works.

The moment we trusted in Christ, we were saved, even without a single good work. Had we died with the next breath, we would have still been saved. But if we continued to live, and most of us have, then our salvation quickly begins to produce good works in our lives.

I told you the story some years back about how when I was 28, God gave me the privilege of leading my dad to put his trust in Jesus while he lay in the hospital on his death bed. Dad only lived a few days after he trusted Christ, but in those few days, every time someone came into his hospital room, very quickly my dad would say, "Do you know what happened to me? I got saved." Or he would say, "I asked Jesus to come into my life." That boldness in conversation was so unlike my dad, but genuine faith brought him salvation, and salvation began to produce good works although my dad could not even crawl out of bed.

Passage three: **James 2:20-24 NKJV** 20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that **faith without works is dead?** 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? 22 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and **by works faith was made perfect?** 23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.*" And he was called the friend of God. 24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

#3 Faith is the beginning of a person's salvation,

but good works are the completion of saving faith.

Paul tells us in Romans that Abraham was saved by faith when he believed God, and it was accounted to him as righteousness. What James wants us to remember and understand is that Abraham's getting saved was not the end of the story. Rather Abraham's initial faith was made perfect by the good works salvation within him produced. Interestingly, the word perfect is a form of the word Jesus used when He declared victory on the cross. Jesus cried out "It is finished!" which could be translated "It is completed!" or "It is perfected!" speaking of His death to pay the penalty for sin to provide the grace for us who believe to be saved.

In fact, a study of salvation in the Scriptures reveals that it is spoken of in the past as an act accomplished, in the present as a reality in the here and now, and in the future as something yet to be. We who have trusted Christ have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved.

While salvation begins in a moment when we first come to faith, salvation for each of us continues forever. Faith is the beginning. Good works complete our saving faith.

Passage four is a single verse. **Romans 6:22 NKJV But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.**

#4 Faith initiates salvation,

but good works provide evidence of salvation.

But now that you have changed masters, no longer enslaved to sin but willingly enslaved to God through Christ, your life will produce holy fruit. Notice that Paul says, "You have your fruit to holiness." He does not say, "You should have," or "You ought to have," or "Some of you have." He declares "You have holy fruit."

An oft missed or perhaps oft ignored truth of the Scriptures is that the truly born again Christian will produce holy fruit or good works from his or her life. Their salvation is not a result of their works; their works are a result of their salvation.

A person who has been set free from enslavement to sin and been saved through faith in Christ does not remain the same old person he or she once was. Paul adds in

2 Corinthians 5:17 NKJV Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

This truth offers to us the best test of whether or not we have really been saved. We should so test ourselves.

2 Corinthians 13:5 NKJV Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? ...

We should not be afraid to examine ourselves to see if we are “in the faith,” to test whether or not Jesus Christ is really inside of us. And what is that test? How do we conduct that examination?

Is it a memory test? How much do you remember about when you were saved? Do you remember how you felt? Do you remember what you said? Do you remember what you prayed? Did you pray the sinner’s prayer?

These are tests often applied by Christians and sadly sometimes by preachers. Those are not the right tests. Neither our salvation nor our security is based on memory of what happened a year ago or 80 years ago. The Bible does not say we have to remember in order to be saved. Salvation is a present reality. If Christ came into our life, He still lives in our life. We can check the here and now, not the ancient past.

The biblical test of salvation is the changed life. Are you a new creation? Are there works of righteousness being done in place of works of sin? Not are you perfect? Not is there ever any sin that comes back into your life? But are you different? Has Christ changed you?

If the answer to that is yes, “I am not yet all I ought to be, but I am not what I used to be, by the working of Christ in my life,” then you are saved. If the answer is no, “I am no different, in fact maybe worse, than on that day that I have counted as my day of salvation,” then my friend, you have not really been saved. A saved person will have both holy fruit and everlasting life. And he will not have the latter without the former.

Examine yourself right now. Is the evidence of good works, or holy fruit in your life right now? If not, don’t think you have to add that to get saved. That won’t work. But the absence of holy fruit, of good works in your life, is certain proof that you are not saved, and you need to genuinely trust Jesus as your Lord and Savior and be saved today. Then genuine salvation will produce the good works which are evidence of genuine faith.

Passage 5: 1 Peter 2:11–12 NKJV 11 Beloved, I beg *you* as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, 12 having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, **by your good works** which they observe, **glorify God** in the day of visitation.

Matthew 5:14-16 NKJV 14 “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house. 16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your **good works** and glorify your Father in heaven.

#5 Sin in the life of the Christian fuels the criticism of unbelievers,

but good works by the Christian cause unbelievers to glorify God.

Wow! You know how it works. Let a person who is known as a Christian be caught in some fleshly sin, and the generous tolerance of people’s faults and weaknesses disappears instantly.

But the opposite is also true. It just happens more slowly, and the expression of it is more subdued. When Christians repeatedly and regularly do good works, people do notice, and both believers and unbelievers will give God glory for what they see in you.

Folks, God received great glory because of what you did following Hurricane Michael. The fact that you so quickly responded by giving out food and supplies, by sending out teams to clean up and cut trees, by giving a hug with a meal and helping people carry diapers to their cars, many of those people went home and gave glory to God.

When I shared sentence number one with you based on Ephesians 2:8-10, I said,

#1 We receive eternal life by faith,

but we fulfill our eternal purpose by good works.

This is part of it. Our purpose is to glorify God and to cause others to glorify Him also. Our good works accomplish that!

I was having lunch one day about a month ago, and as I got up from my table to go pay my bill, two ladies at another table stopped me and said, "You're the pastor at St. Andrew Baptist aren't you." My mind started racing. Who are these ladies? How do they know me, and should I know them, because I don't. Then they said, "We just want to thank you and your congregation for all they did for us after the storm. Everything we needed, we got at your church." They went on and on glorifying God for His gracious provision, but often mentioning how that provision for them had flowed through your hands, St. Andrew.

And that is exactly how God intends for it to work. Good works by the Christian cause both believers and unbelievers to glorify God!

Our sixth and final passage today is from Matthew 25, Jesus' parable of the talents. Remember Jesus said a land owner went on a journey and left one servant with five talents, another with two, and another with one. When he came back the servant with five had used them to grow them to ten. The second servant had grown his two to four. The last servant's one coin was unused and he gave it back to Jesus.

Our Lord blessed the two men who used what they had been given and told them

Matthew 25:23 NKJV ... 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

Jesus said the same thing to the one given many talents and to the one given few, because both of them used what the lord gave them for his glory.

But to the one who produced nothing at all, Jesus said of him, **Matthew 25:26–28 NKJV ... 'You wicked and lazy servant, ... take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents.'**

And then Jesus announced the meaning of the parable. **Matthew 25:29–30 NKJV 29 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. 30 And cast the**

unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

The lost have no good works at all, for even those things they did that seemed good to the world were done out of selfish motives and sin. They are cast into hell.

Here is the statement of comparison and contrast, and it may be the most important observation of all for many who are here today.

#6 We will be admitted to the millennial kingdom because we had faith,

but we will be given our place of authority and responsibility in the millennial kingdom based on our good works.

CONCLUSION:

Give your answers to these question to the Lord.

1. Is there evidence of genuine salvation in your life?
2. If not, would you trust in Christ today and be saved?
3. Are good works as present in your life today as they used to be?
4. If not, would you be willing to repent and recommit your life to Christ today?
5. Are there people glorifying God today because of the holy fruit of good works in your life?