

Good Works, The Purpose of Scripture

Text: II Timothy 3:1-17; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 24

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Beloved, each and every believer is perfectly righteous before God, righteous with the righteousness of God Himself through the obedience of Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry. That was the teaching of Lord's Day 23. But now the *Catechism* in Lord's Day 24 asks, what about good works? Before conversion, all the so-called good works of the elect are sin; and after conversion, they remain imperfect and contribute nothing to justification. The believer never seeks to merit with God by good works. Even unfallen angels cannot merit, for a creature cannot merit with the Creator. Christ said in Luke 17:10, even if a man were to do all, he is still an unprofitable servant. That is Christ's own verdict.

So why must we do good works? Because of God's eternal decree, because of the saving work of regeneration, and because of the cross of Christ.

Ephesians 2:10 declares, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." God's eternal purpose includes not only who will be saved but also the good works of each saint. If someone claims to believe yet does not walk in good works, then according to the Word of God, he is not a Christian at all. Titus 2:14 says Christ "gave himself for us... to purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Good works are not optional add-ons to salvation but part of its goal. The cross does not merely secure pardon; it secures *purity*. The redeemed are to be zealous, fervent, active in doing what pleases the Lord. The gospel produces fruit. And this is not only true individually. The church, as a whole, is to be rich in good works, shining forth as a city on a hill. And that light must shine continually, day by day, in the world's darkness. A church that is careless in holiness will soon be careless in doctrine too.

Scripture Explains Good Works

II Timothy 3:16-17 tells us that Scripture is inspired and profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness, "that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." The purpose of Scripture for believers is to lead them to good works. For the reprobate, it leaves them without excuse. God's supreme purpose in all things is His own glory, and

good works serve that purpose. Scripture explains good works by revealing their standard, goal, and inward principle, and these three elements are essential for any work to be truly *good*.

The *standard* is *the law of God*, the Ten Commandments. Without that standard, people devise their own. This is the root of false religion, of humanism, of Phariseeism. They invent a low standard they can meet and call themselves good. But God thunders His standard from Sinai, and Romans 3:23 declares, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." The law calls us to love God with all our heart and our neighbour as ourselves. Even our children know they don't love their siblings as themselves. So we must confess we have only a "small beginning" of new obedience, as the *Catechism* says in Lord's Day 44 – and that beginning is from the Holy Spirit.

The *goal* of good works is *God's glory*. It is not just about being kind or neighbourly. It is not mere humanitarianism. Luke 16:15 says, "That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." I Corinthians 10:31 declares, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." Colossians 3:17 adds, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." The true Christian desires not his own applause or reward, but the honour of the Triune God. That is the end to which all our obedience must tend. When the believer helps his neighbour, raises his children, or labours at his job, he does it all with the purpose of honouring the God who redeemed him.

The *inward principle* of good works is *faith*. It must come from a believing heart. Romans 14:23 says, "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." Without faith in Christ, there are no good works. This refutes the heresy of "common grace" which teaches that the unbeliever can do good works. Jesus said, "Without me ye can do *nothing*" (John 15:5), meaning nothing good. Faith alone makes the work good. The heart must be united to Christ. It is not merely outward conformity that God seeks. The same action can be sin in one man and obedience in another, depending on the principle from which it flows. The regenerate man, acting from faith and love, obeys God. We must be born again to obey rightly. The Spirit sanctifies us and causes us to walk in God's statutes. We love because He first loved us.

Scripture gives examples of good works. Matthew 5:16: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Christ Himself performed many good works (John 10:32). Acts 9 speaks of Dorcas, full of good works. I Timothy 5:10 mentions bringing up children, lodging strangers, washing the saints' feet, and relieving the afflicted. The rich are to "be rich in good works" (I Tim. 6:18). Ministers are to be patterns

of good works (Titus 2:7), and Titus 3 commands us to maintain them: “This is a faithful saying... that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works.” These works arise from faith, flow through love, and return to God in praise. That is the beautiful circle of grace.

Scripture Enables Good Works

Scripture not only explains but enables good works. II Timothy 3:16-17 says, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God... that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” “Inspiration” means “God-breathed.” Every book, chapter, verse, word, and letter is breathed out by God. Once a church denies this, it loses its foundation for good works. Scripture is profitable – first, for “doctrine.” This is often hated, but it is necessary. Doctrine of total depravity, doctrine of good works, election, redemption, regeneration – all are necessary. And if we lose these truths, we lose the fuel and form of godliness.

Second, Scripture is profitable for “reproof.” It exposes error and sin, especially our wrong views about good works.

Third, it “corrects” us, showing us the right path.

Fourth, it gives “instruction in righteousness” – literally, *discipline*. It trains us to walk in God’s way. People dislike doctrine and discipline, but the Bible gives both. Christ is called Master (Teacher), and His followers are disciples (learners). These are not optional extras. This is the very structure of Christian life. And thus, the church, by preaching the Word, is to shape and mould God’s people for a life of true obedience. That is why preaching must be doctrinal and practical. That is why catechising children, studying the Scriptures daily, and memorising God’s truth is so vital.

The goal is that the man of God “may be perfect and throughly furnished.” This includes ministers, office-bearers, and all believers. Are we equipped, or are we sloppy soldiers? The Word changes the person, and then the good works flow from the renewed heart. Worldly methods try to change the behaviour first. The Bible, however, changes the *person*, and then the *life*. The Bible does not teach behaviourism or moral reform. It teaches *transformation*. The man is made new, and the fruit follows. That is why the means of grace matter! That is why we must sit under the Word faithfully and be trained by it. A godly life does not come from mere willpower or external conformity but from the *inner renewal produced by the Spirit through the Word*.

This affirms the sufficiency of Scripture. If the Bible is God-breathed and profitable for all good works, then we need nothing else. Not secular psychology, not humanism, not philosophy, not extra-biblical revelation. *Sola Scriptura* [Scripture Alone]. Let us read it, pray over it, and obey it. That we may be careful to maintain good works, to the glory of our God. Let us say with David in Psalm 119, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Let us say with Paul in Romans 7, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." And let us say with the *Catechism* in Lord's Day 32, that we do good works out of gratitude, to show our thankfulness to God, to be assured of our faith by the fruits thereof, and to win our neighbours to Christ. This is the calling of every believer. Let your life preach Christ where your mouth cannot always reach.

And let us remember the words of Lord's Day 24: even our best works in this life are imperfect and defiled with sin. But by grace they are accepted for Christ's sake. Therefore we do not boast. But we do walk. We walk in love. We walk in light. We walk in the good works that God has before ordained. And we do so by the strength of His Word and Spirit. To Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

Our Father in heaven, forgive, we pray, our sins. We look to that great fountain who is Jesus Christ, to wash us from our unbelief regarding Scripture, from our evil works, from the imperfections, sins and blemishes in our good works, from our forgetfulness of Thee, our carelessness and indifference. We pray, Lord, that Thou will quicken us and cause us, Lord, to turn afresh to Thee and to walk more and more in newness of life. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.