

Title: Good Works

Text: Matthew 5:16; Ephesians 2:10; Titus 2:14

Main Point: The importance of good works for joy and satisfaction.

Date: 9/06/2026

Series: None

GOOD WORKS: INTRODUCTION

I suspect that most do not reflect on Labor Day. For those with a set work schedule, it is a day free from the regular obligations. For others in retirement, Labor Day is no different than any other day. Perhaps the thoughts of Labor Day extend no further than someone in American history providing the current audience with a holiday.

Actually, Labor Day did not begin with the celebration of work. Instead, it began with frustrated workers working 10-12-hour days, six days a week, leading President Grover Cleveland to sign a bill on June 28, 1894, making Labor Day a federal holiday to celebrate the worker. In all practicality, I wonder if the majority do not associate it with work at all, but think only in terms of the unofficial end of summer.

Whatever your understanding of Labor Day, it does highlight a central biblical teaching. In 1517, Martin Luther, a Catholic monk, transformed the Christian understanding of work. In protest of medieval Christianity, which held a distinction between “sacred” work and “ordinary” work, Luther defended the idea that all legitimate occupations could fulfill God’s calling. He saw no difference between monks, nuns, priests, farmers, parents, and shoemakers. All work done to honor God was holy work.

John Calvin (1509-1564), who supported Luther’s ideas, emphasized the sovereignty of God in the realm of work. He claimed that how and why a Christian performed work indicated whether a person was faithful.

The Christian movement known as the Puritans (c. 1558-1650s) carried the European ideas of Luther and Calvin (especially Calvin) to the New World, America—the ideas of responsibility, grit, and integrity (these ideas described what many understand as the Protestant work ethic).

These former leaders linked Christian faithfulness and work inextricably. For them, salvation and work belonged together. I do not mean working for salvation but working because of salvation. No faithful Christian can ignore God’s expectations for work, but what does it mean to be faithful in work?

Before I address the above question, first, I should clarify an essential difference. Most of what I have said so far an atheist could accept. Many atheists work hard, value responsibility, grit, and integrity. They could also align with the broader Labor Day context and, conceivably, agree with the influence of the Protestant Reformation in shaping the American work ethic. So, at this point, there is little difference between a Christian and an atheist. The eternal distinction, however, is with the adjective “good.” The atheist cannot perform “good works” as biblically defined.

Thirteen times in the English Standard Version New Testament (Matthew 5:16; John 10:32; Acts 9:36; 1 Timothy 2:10; 5:10, 25; 6:18; Titus 2:7, 14; 3:8, 14; Hebrews 10:24) it uses “good works.” Alan Cairns, in *The Dictionary of Theological Terms*, explains what the Bible means by “good works.”

[Good works] are works that are pure as to their motive, lawful as to their execution, and God-glorifying as to their aim.

No fallen man [nonChristian] can originate such works (Rom. 8:7). . . . Thus, when the Scripture (e.g., Rom. 3:12) declares that no fallen man can originate good works, it is teaching in the most emphatic terms that no sinner can gain salvation by his own merit. In line with this, Protestantism emphasizes the biblical doctrine of a free justification through faith alone: that is, justification by the merits of Christ, without any contributory merit from the sinner, received by faith, which is itself the gift of God (Eph. 2:8, 9).

While the carnal mind is incapable of originating good works (Rom. 8:7), the ‘new creature in Christ’ (2 Cor. 5:17), the man redeemed and purified by the blood of Christ, is to be zealous for good works (Titus 2:14; Eph. 2:10). These works are the fruit of salvation, not the ground of it. They are produced by the working of the Lord indwelling His people (Phil. 2:13). (Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Belfast; Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002), 197–198.)

Romans 8:30 makes clear that no one “in the flesh” can please God. Only by the working of the Holy Spirit can someone accomplish His pleasure: “for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). Unlike those who are not Christians, Christians have the Holy Spirit working in them for both desire and strength to please God in good works.

Hopefully, with essential differences clear, I am now ready to develop some of God’s expectations for good works.

GOOD WORKS: QUESTIONS

As I begin with God’s expectations, I imagine you have questions.

- Does good work only include holding some form of a job? Answer: No, it is not about a job, but the work done to honor and advance God’s mission on earth. It may include a job or volunteer service, such as offering childcare, sitting with the grieving, providing a meal for the sick, or leading a family devotion.
- Does good work mean God is opposed to leisure? Answer: No, God rested (Genesis 2:2-3; Exodus 20:11; 31:17; Hebrews 4:3-11) and expects His people to follow His example.
- What does good work mean for those retired? Answer: The Bible never excuses an able person from good work, no matter the season of life. Jesus expects every follower to find a way to advance His work on earth.

- How can someone perform good work with weakening or failing health? Answer: It may mean treating a caregiver with kindness, developing a strong prayer ministry, or writing notes of encouragement, among other things.
- Conclusion: The bottom line is that as long as there is breath and consciousness, God expects good work from all His people.

GOOD WORKS: THE BIBLE

1. Good works are a means of sharing your testimony: “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).
 - 1.1. As a follower of Jesus, everything we do has consequences, for good or bad. The quality of our work, the attitude while working, whether we fulfill or break our word concerning work, and how we handle frustration at work either communicate godliness or cloud or confuse it.
 - 1.1.1. I have recently had two frustrations regarding witness and work. It was this verse that helped me maintain self-control in my attitude.
2. Good works supply purpose and satisfaction to your life: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).
 - 2.1. All design has a designer. Only the designer fully comprehends the intricacies that allow something created to reach its full purpose. You may feel depressed and struggle to find purpose in life. Maybe you are out of alignment with your design. I suggest you pause and consider how much of your life you give to making God known, as this may help relieve your depression by helping you find meaning and purpose. The more you understand and fulfill your created purpose, the greater the increase in joy and life-satisfaction.
 - 2.2. I remember the wise words of a senior saint: “When you are discouraged, find a way to serve another,” and it often helps with discouragement.
3. Followers of Jesus should be zealous for good works: “Jesus Christ, who 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” (Titus 2:13-14).
 - 3.1. “Zealous” translates the Greek word, *ζηλωτής*. The New Testament uses the word in both the negative sense (“jealousy,” Acts 5:17; 13:45; and “zeal without knowledge,” Romans 10:2) and the positive sense (John 2:17; 2 Corinthians 7:11; 11:2) as here in Titus.
 - 3.2. Galatians 1:14 describes the intensity of the word: “I [Paul] was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the

traditions of my fathers.” Paul’s zeal/passion was so strong that he was willing to kill Christians, believing this was honoring to God.

3.3. God not only expects Christians to perform good works but also to do so with a strong passion to reveal God and to align with His design for their lives.

3.3.1. The more you know God, the more zeal for His work increases—the more your life centers on you, the less zeal for God.

3.3.2. At first, good works may be rote and rigid—keep doing them; the more you seek to make God known and align with His created order, the more you find joy and satisfaction in life. Why? Because the Designer created you for good works. This is why one of Castine’s Core Values is to serve both inside and outside the church. It is to lead you to better alignment with God’s design, resulting in increased joy and satisfaction.

GOOD WORKS: CONCLUSION

Good works cannot save anyone, but no saved person should be indifferent to them. Matthew 5:16 teaches that good works display God’s glory. Ephesians 2:10 teaches that good works are part of God’s design for the believer. Titus 2:14 teaches that Christ redeemed and purified a people who are zealous for good works. Therefore, the question is not whether good works matter, but whether our lives increasingly reveal the One who saved us.

This Labor Day, do not think only about work from which you get a day off. Think about the work for which Christ redeemed you. Look at your home, your church, your workplace, your neighborhood, your friendships, your limitations, and your opportunities, and ask: “Lord, what good work have You prepared for me to walk in today?”