

READY FOR EVERY GOOD WORK (Titus 3:1-15)

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Introduction: Titus 3 presses a question that few other passages of Scripture (perhaps some in 1 John) would urge so strongly. The question is this: What is the relation between the Christian faith and good works? Or, how are we to understand the nature of good works and their rightful place in the Christian life, according to the teaching of the New Testament?

On this question of the relation between the Christian faith and good works, there are two opposite errors we must be very careful to avoid.

Error 1 – It is believing that we are saved by good works, or that good works are the basis of, or even constitute part of the basis of, our acceptance before God. This notion is rejected in our text today, and it is an error that Paul regularly denounces, refutes, and rejects. As he declares in Rom 3:20 and Gal 2:16, “by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight.” That we are justified by faith, not by works, is precisely what ensures two things: 1) that our salvation is entirely the work of God, and 2) it ensures that God alone is rightly worthy of glory for His saving of sinners. Eph 2:8-9 puts this so well: “⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, ⁹not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” So indeed, salvation is entirely the work of God, and God alone is rightly worthy of glory for His saving of sinners.

Error 2 – It is believing that since we are saved by faith, apart from works, that good works then are not a necessary part of the Christian faith and life. Even though good works are desirable, and the New Testament commends that we produce them, whether we do good works or not has nothing to do with whether we truly are saved or not, so this view holds. This notion is likewise rejected in Titus, as it is resoundly rejected throughout the New Testament. For example, consider John’s claim in 1 John 3:9, “No one who is born of God practices sin” since being born of God—i.e., saved by faith—means God has changed your nature, the Holy Spirit lives within, and your life is marked now by changes in how you live that are the result of God at work within you. Another example is found in Eph 2:10. Recall that Eph 2:8-9 stresses that we are not saved *by* good works, but in verse 10 Paul argues that we are indeed saved *for* good works. He writes, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” Well, then, if we were created in Christ Jesus for good works, and if God has prepared beforehand for us to walk in these good works, then we conclude that the Christian life must be marked by doing the very good works for which we were created and God prepared for us to do. Good works, then, are a necessary expression/outworking of our being truly saved, of being placed now in Christ.

So, here is an important but delicate question: Are good works necessary to the Christian faith? The correct answer is – No, and Yes! No, if you mean that good works are necessary as the basis of our Christian faith and life. Absolutely not. We are saved by grace, through faith, apart from any and all works. But Yes, if you mean that good works are necessary as the God-ordained outward expression of our being truly saved. Faith and works, belief and behavior, Gospel embrace and growth in good deeds—these go together!

Titus 3 strongly commends the necessity of being ready for every good work (as Paul states in 3:1) while also sounding the warning that we are not to think of good works as the basis of our acceptance before God. Let’s consider some aspects of good works that are taught by the Apostle Paul in this chapter.

Five truths to consider about good works:

1. Good works stand in opposition to lawlessness and evil deeds. (3:1-3, 8-11)

The wording of this first point comes from Paul's declaration of our salvation in Titus 2:14. In many ways, most of chapter 3 of Titus expands on the summary statement that Paul makes at the end of chapter 2, and in v. 14, he contrasts the "lawlessness" of our former lives with the "good works" we are to be zealous in performing now as believers. [Read 2:13-14] So, if Christ redeemed us *from* lawlessness, in order to purify a people zealous *for* good works, then clearly lawlessness and good works are opposites. To pursue good works requires renouncing lawlessness.

Chapter three indicates two manifestations of lawlessness or wickedness that stand opposed to the good works he commends:

First, there are lawless deeds done by others, those who oppose the true gospel of Christ (3:9-11) [Read]. Surely, Paul has in mind the kinds of people he had described earlier in 1:9-16 [Read 1:9b-11, end of 14]. There is a Jewish or Judaizer tone to these particular people and their wicked deeds, no question. But at least some of the wrong-doing mentioned is more general in nature that characterize unbelievers opposed to the truth of God: people who refuse to accept authorities established by God, who are divisive, deceptive, false teachers, seeking personal gain at the expense of others' harm, etc. And notice that these types of people are opposed to the good works that Paul commends in v. 8. Notice the contrast between "profitable" good works of v. 8 and the "unprofitable," worthless works of v. 9.

Second, there are lawless deeds that mark our own lives prior to our being saved (3:3). [Read 3:3] Notice these lawless deeds are marked by yielding to the sway of unbelieving influences, internal domination of our own sin, and attitudes and actions contrary to God and His ways. These evil attitudes and actions also are opposed to the good works he commends in vv. 1-2.
Cf. 2:12

Good works, then, stand in opposition to lawlessness and evil deeds.

2. Good works are not the basis of our being saved. (3:4-7)

[Read 3:4-7]

Question: What have we done in our lives as unbelievers prior to our conversion that is worthy of God's commendation? Answer: Nothing! Not one thing! Rather, all we have done as unbelievers is worthy only of his condemnation! So again, in our lives as unbelievers, nothing we have done merits God's commendation; all that we have done deserves His condemnation. "All of our righteousness is as filthy rags" (Isa 64:6), "there is none righteous, not even one . . . there is none who does good, not even one" (Rom 3:10-12), and "whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all" (James 2:10).

The flow of thought here is strikingly similar to what we see in Eph 2:1-9.

Good works, then, are not the basis of our being saved.

3. Good works are the necessary expression of our being truly saved. (2:14; 3:1, 8, 14)

Look again at Paul's admonitions in Titus 2:14; 3:1, 8, and 14 [Read]. Good works are desired, expected, even commanded in the strongest terms. But are they necessary to the life of faith? Must those who are truly saved demonstrate good works in their lives?

Titus 1:15-16 help us here. We see that ongoing evil works show that those who even profess to be saved are, instead, unbelievers who have nothing to do with the true reality of the Christian faith. [Read 1:15-16]

Jesus likewise spoke in these terms, as we saw earlier in Matt 7 – how do you know that the one who comes to you looking like a sheep is actually a wolf? “You shall know them by their fruits” (Matt 7:16, 20). And sometimes their works have the appearance of being good but are done by trickery and contrary to God's ways – Matt 7:21-23. Notice that what they do is actually to “practice lawlessness.”

So when we read in Titus 3, that we are to “be ready for good works” (3:1), and to be careful to devote ourselves to good works (3:8), and to learn to devote ourselves to good works, to help cases of urgent need and not be unfruitful (3:14), it is evident that good works are expected of all true believers, so much so that if one claims to be a Christian but continues living a life marked consistently by wickedness and disregard for God and His ways, his wicked ways testify that he is not truly saved. So, we are not saved by good works, but we are “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Eph 2:10).

Notice one more important point from Titus 3:5. The connection between being saved by faith, *apart from works*, and being saved *for good works*, is grounded in the work that God does in us when we are saved. Listen to Paul's words carefully in 3:5 [Read]. How does God save us? By the washing of regeneration (i.e., new birth, new life in Christ, being born again, being made a new creation in Christ) and by the renewal of the Holy Spirit (i.e., empowerment to live as God has called us to live, made possible and real only through the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit). God promises this day of the work of the Spirit within us, of regeneration and renewal, in Ezekiel 36:25-27. [Read] Because in our salvation God makes us new – new hearts, new orientation, new desires – and because He empowers us by His Spirit to live lives of increasing obedience, therefore, being truly saved brings with it new life, new empowerment, and new obedience, and hence, new works—good works that God calls us to do. Our obedience and good works are always flawed and imperfect in this life, but one is shown to be a true Christian in part by a growing love for God and His ways, a growing devotion to Christ, and growing good works that flow from his or her new life in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Good works, then, are the necessary expression of our being truly saved.

4. Good works flow from the reality of our salvation, past, present, and future.

Notice the salvation of which Paul speaks.

Past: First, it involves what God has done for us in Christ in the past as well as what we received in the past when we first savingly believed. Paul refers to these elements: Christ's work to redeem us (2:14), regeneration (3:5), and justification (3:7).

Present: Second, it involves what God through Christ does in the present to renew us and perfect us. Christ has poured out upon us the present the gift of the Holy Spirit who then works to renew us into the Christlike people God has designed us to be (3:5-6)

Future: Third, our salvation involves what God promises that we will enter into and receive in fullness in the future. Titus 3:7 speaks also of the future inheritance and eternal life assured to us in our salvation, followed by an admonition to devote ourselves to good works. We also see this in chapter 2 where the good works of vv. 12 and 14 are wrapped around Paul encouraging us to live expectantly, waiting in hope for the appearing of the glory of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

So, good works flow not only from the salvation purchased for us by Christ in the past, and the new life and empowerment we have now from Christ through the Spirit in the present; good works also flow from the hope and joy we have in knowing what awaits us in our future life to come.

Cf. Eph 2:1-7 and 2 Pet 3:10-14 – for emphasis on our future salvation and its impact on our good works now.

Good works, then, flow from the reality of our salvation, past, present, and future.

5. Good works must be practiced by Christians with fidelity, passion, and urgency.

Hear again with me the stress Paul places on our practicing good works: [Read 2:14, 3:1, 8, 14] It is clear that Paul admonishes his readers to engage in and diligently pursue good works, but just what are the good works that Paul commends? Most of what Paul has in mind point toward the *attitudes* we must have, and our *actions* in relation to, other people, especially toward fellow believers.

Attitudes:

Readiness and eagerness to engage in good works (2:14; 3:1)

Ongoing desire to learn better how to devote ourselves to doing good works (3:8, 14)

Submitting to and obeying authorities (3:1), including Christian authorities (2:15; 3:8)

Avoidance of a quarreling spirit (3:2)

Gentleness, kindness, and courtesy toward others (3:2)

A sense of urgency for pressing needs in order to bear fruit in others' lives (3:14)

As one reflects on these together, they seem to emphasize an attitude of wanting what is best for others, to desire their well-being, and to relate to them with care and kindness.

Actions:

Renouncing ungodliness and worldly passions (2:12)

Refusing to speak evil of others (3:2)

Disciplined, upright, godly way of life (2:12)

Living in ways that show kindness and courtesy toward others (3:2)

Helping others with pressing needs when one sees the urgency of the situation (3:14)

Of course, this is a limited listing here of both attitudes and actions that mark the good works Christians are called to carry out. A much fuller listing is found when you consider the “one another” passages of the NT. Here are just a few to add to those in Titus:

Attitudes:

Honor one another above yourselves (Rom 12:10)

Be patient, bearing with one another in love (Eph 4:2)

Be kind and compassionate to one another (Eph 4:32)

Forgive each other (Eph 4:32)

In humility consider others better than yourselves (Phil 2:3)

Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another (1 Pet 5:5)

Actions:

Live in harmony with one another (Rom 12:16)

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you (Rom 15:7)

Bear with each other (Col 3:13)

Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another (Col 3:13)

Admonish one another (Col 3:16)

Encourage each other (1 Thess 4:18; 5:11)

Build up each other (1 Thess 5:11)

George Sweeting – “Seldom suppress a generous impulse.”

Good works, then, must be practiced by Christians with fidelity, passion, and urgency.

Conclusion: We’ve seen this morning 5 truths regarding good works that Paul articulates in Titus chapter three:

Good works stand in opposition to lawlessness and evil deeds.

Good works are not the basis of our being saved.

Good works are the necessary expression of our being truly saved.

Good works flow from the reality of our salvation, past, present, and future.

Good works must be practiced by Christians with fidelity, passion, and urgency.

May God help us to avoid both pitfalls we discussed at the beginning of this sermon, and may we grow, indeed flourish, in learning increasingly to be a people who devote themselves to good deeds. By God’s grace and power, for the good of ourselves and others, and for the glory of His matchless name, may this be so. Amen.

GAZING ON THE GLORY OF CHRIST'S CHURCH

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SESSION 4 – OUR SERVICE TOWARD ONE ANOTHER

- I. Introduction – While God provides gifted leaders to the church, to train and equip, he provides these so that the individual members may be equipped and used in the lives of one another to help each grow to become increasingly what Christ has redeemed us to be. Here's a simple but crucial truth: we need one another! Each of us has *something to give to others*, and each of us has *something to receive from others*. So, how can we cultivate a culture of giving and receiving that promotes growth in Christ-likeness?
- II. The Depth and Breadth of the “One Another” Ministry of the Body of Christ
 - A. The general principle of “one another” ministry from Hebrews:

Heb 10:23-25 – ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; ²⁴ and *let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds*, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.
 - B. Love Toward One Another

Love one another (John 13:34, 35; 15:12, 17; Rom 13:8; 1 Thess 4:9; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 5)
Be devoted to one another in brotherly love (Rom 12:10)
Serve one another in love (Gal 5:13)
Make your love increase and overflow for each other (1 Thess 3:12)
Fervently love one another from the heart (1 Pet 1:22)
Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another (1 Pet 4:8)
 - C. Attitudes Regarding One Another

Be at peace with each other (Mark 9:50)
Honor one another above yourselves (Rom 12:10)
Be patient, bearing with one another in love (Eph 4:2)
Be kind and compassionate to one another (Eph 4:32)
Forgive each other (Eph 4:32)
Have equal concern for each other (1 Cor 12:25)
In humility consider others better than yourselves (Phil 2:3)
Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another (1 Pet 5:5)
 - D. Actions to Carry out Toward One Another

You also ought to wash one another's feet (John 13:14)
Live in harmony with one another (Rom 12:16)
Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you (Rom 15:7)
Instruct one another (Rom 15:14)

Greet one another with a holy kiss / kiss of love (Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Pet 5:14)
When you come together to eat, wait for each other (1 Cor 11:33)
Bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:2)
Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Eph 5:19)
Submit one to another out of reverence for Christ (Eph 5:21)
Bear with each other (Col 3:13)
Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another (Col 3:13)
Teach . . . one another (Col 3:16)
Admonish one another (Col 3:16)
Encourage each other (1 Thess 4:18; 5:11)
Build up each other (1 Thess 5:11)
Encourage one another daily (Heb 3:13)
Spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Heb 10:24)
Encourage one another (Heb 10:25)
Confess your sins to each other (James 5:16)
Pray for each other (James 5:16)
Live in harmony with one another (1 Pet 3:8)
Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling (1 Pet 4:9)
Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others (1 Pet 4:10)

E. Actions to Refrain from Doing Toward One Another

Stop passing judgment on one another (Rom 14:13)
If you bite and devour each other . . . you will be destroyed by each other (Gal 5:15)
Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other (Gal 5:26)
Do not lie to each other (Col 3:9)
Do not slander one another (James 4:11)
Do not grumble against each other (James 5:9)

IV. Conclusion and Application

- A. Consider what threatens true love and care for one another and work to abolish it.
E.g., pride, jealousy, greed, competitiveness, comparison, pettiness, self-focus, judgmental spirit, desire for revenge, unforgiveness, gossip, rudeness, divisiveness
- B. Consider what promotes true love and care for one another and work to advance it.
E.g., humility, patience, kindness, forgiveness, others-focus, graciousness, "gracious diminishing," sharefulness, rejoicing in other's gifting, desire for other's flourishing
- C. Consider the "one another's" and select two or three to put into practice, even now. How may I better serve others? How may I grow in building them up to be more like Christ?